



# View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

## The New Year opens with pain, pride and promise

January 11, 2016



Dear Reader,

It was an emotional opening to the New Year. The loss of life, human suffering and property damage from historic flooding was sinking in and the year-end report on traffic deaths on Missouri highways showed a dramatic increase.

Amidst this grim backdrop, the indomitable spirit of Missourians shone forth as so many, worked so long, in the most inhospitable conditions – winter-time flooding – to protect their neighbor. Special thanks to the employees of MoDOT and our partners in the Missouri

Highway Patrol, the National Guard and many other state and local agencies for the personal sacrifices they made. We sometimes forget that our funding for transportation is not just about asphalt, concrete and steel; it is also about flesh, blood and sinew.

During the final days of the year, flooding hit many areas of the state, and many counties were declared a disaster. Whether closing roads as necessary, assisting motorists, updating travel information or answering phones, MoDOT employees were out in full force to help detour motorists around the closures and keep them safe on our highways. At the peak of the flooding more than 285 roads were closed. I-44 was closed in three locations – Hazelgreen, Jerome and St. Louis. I-70 and I-55 were closed in St. Louis. Other major roads closed included Routes 141, 67, 61, 60, 63, 50, 47 and 19. Snow in western and northern Missouri added to the problems. Customer Service representatives took 46,672 calls over a nine-day period, which is more than the 41,000 calls taken during the months of July and August combined.

The year also ended with over an 11 percent increase in fatalities on Missouri roads. After two years of lower numbers, by year's end, 853 lives had been lost in traffic crashes. Sixty-three percent of the drivers and passengers killed were not wearing seat belts. Combined efforts in

engineering, law enforcement, education and emergency medical services aid in the reduction of roadway fatalities. All of this, however, takes resources.

This New Year dawned with a very human face: of those lost and those who served.

The challenge for the Commission as it returned this past week to Jefferson City to open the New Year – and a new legislative session – was to put a personal face on transportation. On the eve of the opening day, members of the General Assembly attended an open house at MoDOT headquarters where they had an opportunity to meet new Director Patrick McKenna, hear his hopes for the coming year and personally speak with commissioners. Those attending included Sen. Ron Richard, president pro tem, Sen. Mike Kehoe, majority floor leader, Sen. Doug Libla, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, and Rep. Glen Kolkmeier, chairman of the House Transportation Committee.

Senate leadership committed to get right to work to address transportation and so they have. By this past Thursday, the first 100 pre-filed bills, including Sen. Libla's SB 623 calling for a modest 1½-/3½-cent increase in the gas/diesel tax had been referred to committee and Sen. Libla has already set the bill for a committee hearing at 8:15 a.m. this Wednesday, January 13, in Senate Committee Hearing Room 1 at the Capitol. This prompt response to the funding crisis is most promising. Those wishing to testify before the committee should contact Sen. Libla at (573) 751-4843.

When the rains came and our rivers overflowed, those charged with responsibility did more than wring their hands and wish that something could be done – they immediately rolled up their sleeves and got to work for the good of all Missourians. Our legislators have a chance to do the same. The Senate is off to a good start. Let's hope the momentum builds and all our legislators unite behind a solution for our long-term transportation funding challenge.

Let's get going!

Stephen R. Miller  
Chairman

If you would like to communicate with the Commission, you can always reach us at [MHTC@modot.mo.gov](mailto:MHTC@modot.mo.gov). If you would like to read previous issues of the "View," you can find them on the MoDOT website: <http://www.modot.org/ViewFromTheChair/index.htm>

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