



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Deferring Maintenance Speeds Decay and Drives Up Cost

March 26, 2015



Dear «GreetingLine»

“You can pay me now, or pay me later” was how an auto mechanic explained to his customer in an old commercial that he could (1) pay to replace the oil and filter now, or (2) pay a far larger sum for the replacement of the vehicle’s engine later.

That’s exactly the spot in which we find ourselves with Missouri’s roads and bridges. But unfortunately, with insufficient revenue sources, we have no choice but to prioritize where we make our capital investments and that means we are putting off maintenance and other improvements on the remainder of the system that will cost much more down the road.

At a \$325 million level of investment, which is all that will be available starting in 2017, MoDOT will be forced to focus its limited funding on taking care of the approximately 8,000 miles of primary roads and bridges that are most critical to Missouri’s needs. While we’ll be able to keep our primary system in good condition, taking care of the supplementary roads – some 26,000 miles – is another story.

Although you may have heard this story before, what you probably don’t realize is that the deterioration in those 26,000 miles of roads and bridges will not occur on a straight-line basis; it will increase geometrically. MoDOT maintains a regular maintenance schedule on its statewide system that attempts to catch small problems that can be fixed relatively inexpensively before they become much larger and more costly issues.

This is particularly important given our Missouri climate. As pavement ages cracks develop allowing moisture to penetrate. Freezing temperatures cause the moisture to freeze and expand increasing the size of the crack or fissure. As the process continues, traffic causes parts of the

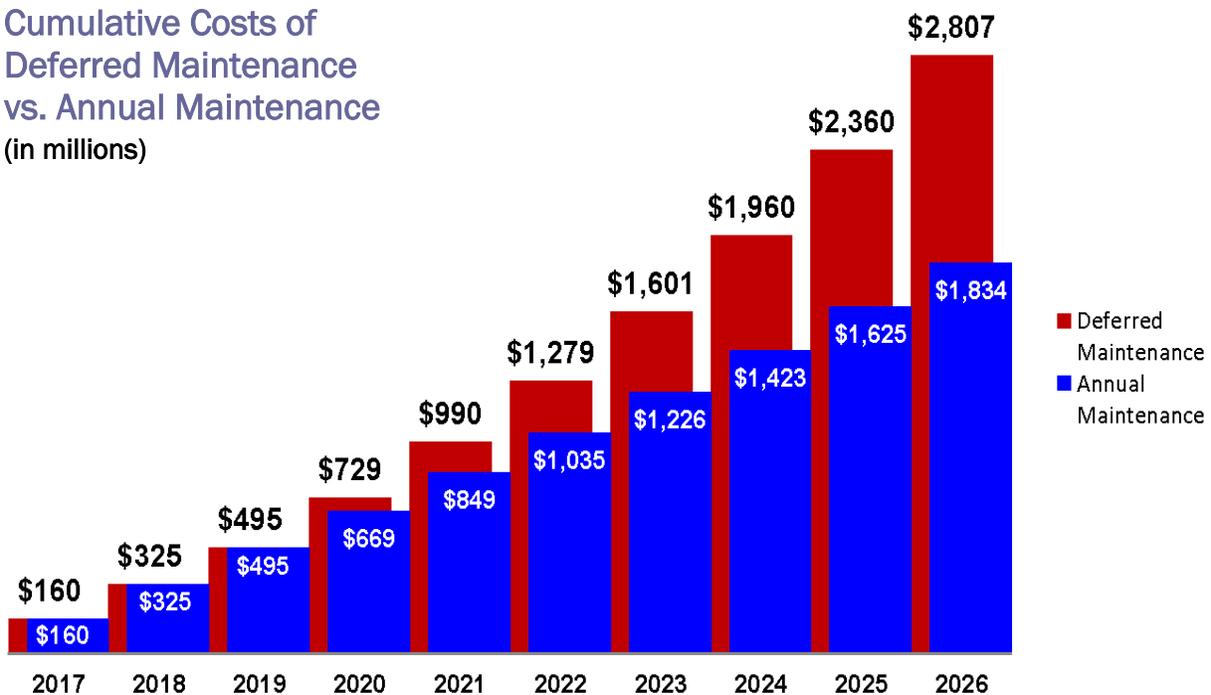
pavement to lose integrity opening a pothole. Left unattended, this pothole allows for the infiltration of still more moisture, accelerating the process of decay.

MoDOT combats deterioration by employing its resources to promptly seal cracks and fill in pot holes. Pothole repairs are important band-aids but they have their limitations. They don't provide the same integrity as the original pavement. Therefore, on a scheduled basis, MoDOT will perform asphalt pavement overlay to return the road to good condition. Unfortunately MoDOT will no longer have the resources to respond to these needs on the supplementary system as it has in the past.

Historically, MoDOT has spent \$160 million annually in contract work on the supplementary system. As the condition of those roads deteriorates, the cost of repairing them increases. Over time, the cost of the original repair will increase as will the size of the job. Just as a failure to address a leak in the roof, or termites in the timbers of your home, or the routine care for your teeth causes the problem to grow exponentially, the same will be true of our highway system.

The chart below demonstrates this frightening phenomenon. The blue bars represent what MoDOT would spend on a cumulative basis over the course of ten years – if it had the money – to maintain the 26,000-mile supplementary system in the same condition it is today. (Not improving it as we should; just keeping it from getting worse.) The red bar represents cumulative cost to restore the system to today's condition if MoDOT is forced to implement the 325 System and defer maintenance on supplementary roads.

Cumulative Costs of Deferred Maintenance vs. Annual Maintenance
(in millions)



As the chart depicts, the cost for deferred and annual maintenance on Missouri's supplementary system is the same for the first two years. However, by the third year deferred maintenance will

increase because, left unattended, the pavement will deteriorate at an accelerating rate requiring more extensive and costly repairs. The total deferred cost over that 10-year period would reach \$2.8 billion – \$1 billion more than the cost if funds were available for annual maintenance.

If we stop investing in our annual maintenance we will pay the price, and it's doubtful that we will ever be able to catch up.

It's time we act now to find the resources that will enable our children and grandchildren to have a modern and efficient transportation system that is not saddled with repair needs that were ignored by their ancestors.

Let's get going!

Stephen R. Miller
Chairman

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