



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Small Ball Wins Games

April 9, 2015



Dear Reader,

Baseball season is finally here. A season after our two state teams nearly met in the World Series, there are great expectations on both sides of the state. There is also great expectation as people of Missouri look to see what the Senate will do with SB 540 which offers a six-cent increase in the state fuel tax over the next three years. What do baseball and transportation funding have in common? Winning is not always a product of swinging for the fences.

In baseball, the Royals proved last year that it is possible to win the pennant through hard work and fundamentals. Find a way to get on first; it doesn't make any difference if it is a sharp single to the outfield, beating out an infield hit or a drag bunt. Put yourself in a position to do more. From there the options open up. Advance the runner to second with a bunt or a steal. Be prepared to take third on a fielder's choice or a passed ball. Race home on a sacrifice fly. Perhaps not as flashy or captivating as that towering drive over the center field wall – but they both add a run for the home team.

SB 540 is far from the home run that many hoped for with Amendment 7. SB 540 would bring Missouri about one-third of what Amendment 7 promised. It offers nothing for the reconstruction and expansion of I-70, very few of the Amendment 7 projects and no funding for any other modes of transportation.

For some this is a disappointment. "Go big or go home," they say. They argue that six cents does not even represent a tax increase from a purchasing-power perspective. Taxpayers have actually been receiving a tax cut every year since the last adjustment in 1992 because the fuel tax was not indexed at the time to account for inflation. They cite the fact that the real value of the state fuel tax and any corresponding burden of paying it has decreased from 17 cents to less than 8 cents. And, 70 percent of that, or a paltry 5.6 cents, goes to MoDOT where it is shared with the Department of Revenue (to compensate for collection costs) and the Highway Patrol.

And you know something, from a certain perspective they are right. A six-cent increase does not come close to doing what we ought to do. They quickly point to Iowa where its Republican Governor and Republican House increased the fuel tax by 10 cents – from 20 cents for gasoline to 30 cents and from 22 cents for diesel to 32 cents. They also note Iowa has approximately one third the highway miles (8,900) we have in Missouri (34,000) and before the latest increase was already investing \$62,000 per mile compared with approximately \$14,000 per mile in Missouri .

As we expect our baseball teams to be contenders and for the owners to invest the money to make that possible, they bemoan the fact that we are apparently comfortable as a state to dwell in the cellar. And for them, last place is not acceptable when the wins and losses mean much more than a place in the standings – they represent economic opportunities and lives.

It is hard to argue against them. But the reality is, there is no opportunity for the home run; a public vote is not possible this time around and constitutional amendments from decades ago limit how much the General Assembly can raise revenue in a single year. That is no reason, however, not to stand in the box and work to get around the bases any way we can. Sen. Libla's bill provides that opportunity. It allows us to get to first base. From there we can look for other opportunities to advance.

SB 540 also sends a message that we are not content with losing – losing lives, losing job opportunities. So let's cheer the Senate this week and next as it steps to the plate.

Go Cardinals! Go Royals! Go Senate!!

Stephen R. Miller
Chairman

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