



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Emergency Closure of Major Missouri River Bridge

May 7, 2015



Dear Reader,

In the middle of yesterday's Commission meeting in Jefferson City, MoDOT Chief Engineer Ed Hassinger and Kansas City District Engineer Dan Niec interrupted us to report that a bridge over the Missouri River needed to be closed immediately. An in-progress inspection of the Missouri Route 291 northbound bridge over the Missouri River near Sugar Creek revealed serious deterioration of the steel truss in a critical location.

The closure to ensure public safety while a repair could be determined was absolutely the right course of action, but it is one that comes with considerable impact. Until the 66-year-old bridge can be repaired, traffic will be rerouted to the southbound bridge with one lane of traffic in each direction. That means daily pain for the drivers of nearly 25,000 vehicles who cross the two bridges each day.

This is the third bridge in the Kansas City area that has had to be unexpectedly closed in the past year. There are a number of other examples across the state. These closures can mean long and costly detours for motorists and for the efficient movement of goods. But when an inspection reveals problems, they must be done. The only solution is act now – today – to take the first step to address our funding crisis.

The clock is ticking with just over one week remaining in the legislative session. It is essential the Senate act today! Only a few days remain in the legislative session and Senator Doug Libla's bill is still tied up in the Senate. The good news is that President Pro Tem Tom Dempsey (R-St. Peters) and Majority Floor Leader Ron Richard (R-Joplin) have added their leadership to the effort. But even with this courageous leadership, procedural rules allow just one or two senators to keep the measure from coming to a vote.

Governor Jay Nixon will add the full weight of his office today as he visits the Route 291 bridge outside Kansas City. The Governor is expected to call upon the Senate and the House to pass this measure and send it to his desk.

Ask those legislators who are preventing a vote for what principle are they fighting. It is certainly not for the best interest of the majority of Missourians who want safe bridges and economic activity. How do they explain what they are doing to those thousands of motorists who today will be caught in the traffic tie-up on Route 291 – burning up hard-earned money on fuel as they idle and grind slowly along the single lane of traffic, late for jobs, appointments, picking up kids – or worse.

Let's get this done!

Stephen R. Miller
Chairman

If you would like to communicate with the Commission, you can always reach us at 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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