



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Not All New Years Are Happy

July 6, 2015



Dear Reader,

July 1st marked the beginning of a new year for the Missouri Department of Transportation – fiscal year 2016. For many of us a new year is a chance to look forward with great anticipation. The mood was a little different when the Missouri Highways and Transportation Committee gathered in Clinton on July 1. We were certainly excited to be in the hometown of Commissioner Gregg Smith, but the mood was decidedly more somber as we were presented the transportation plan for the next five years.

We have all heard the expressions, “the tip of the iceberg” or “the canary in the coal mine.” They express the idea that small things are the harbinger of much worse things to come. Well, our State Transportation Improvement Program, or STIP, is just such a harbinger. Missourians who drive our roads today may see orange barrels and roads that don't appear all that bad. But the STIP we approved provides a glimpse to a future that no Missourian should want. For the first time in history no expansion projects were added to the STIP.

What is an “expansion” project? It is an improvement such as a new lane, interchange or bridge that may bring economic development, relieve congestion or improve safety. Ironically, in Clinton, three separate groups appeared before us to petition for expansion projects they each deemed vital to the future of their community or region.

- The Highway 13 Corridor Coalition hoped to complete the four-laning of Highway 13 to create a corridor from Springfield to Interstate 35 that connects 12 counties, 570,000 residents, 28 hospitals, 13 colleges and universities, Whiteman Air Force Base and Truman, Stockton and Pomme deTerre lakes.
- Golden Valley Hospital informed us they are making a multi-million dollar expansion and need improved access to the hospital. They warned that the failure to do so would “leave

the hospital and our patients vulnerable in major medical emergencies.” Poor connectivity means minutes and lives lost.

- The U.S. Highway 65 Commerce Corridor Coalition urged the completion of four lanes along Highway 65 to create an economic corridor from Arkansas to Iowa that would “align Missouri’s main agricultural areas, a growing number of manufacturing and logistic firms, our third largest city and our primary recreational and growth areas.” In particular the city of Warsaw pleaded for better and safer highway access.

We hear these pleas for help everywhere we go in Missouri. These are not people looking for a handout; they are committed, engaged Missourians who aspire to a better life and work hard to make it a reality. The 2016-2020 STIP we approved sent a resounding “NO” to these and every other project like them in the state. Not a single one was added to the five-year plan.

Even worse the “preservation” projects we added this year will not be sufficient to actually preserve our system. We will continue to prioritize the 8,000 miles on our primary system but the 26,000 miles on the supplementary system will deteriorate. Approximately 25 percent of those roads are in poor condition today; in 10 years the number is projected to be 75 percent. And, I haven’t even discussed our bridges.

On another historic – or ignominious – note our first contract awards of the year were the lowest in memory at only \$7 million and there is no bid letting scheduled for this coming month – not a good situation for Missouri contractors who are now seeking work in our neighboring states where their prospects are brighter.

So it was not a happy new year at MoDOT. Perhaps the most maddening thing is that it is all within our control. We can choose to invest in our dreams ... or fall farther behind. Make your voice heard. This year did not start on a happy note, but we have the power to change that.

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. 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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