



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

A Final View

June 15, 2016



Dear Reader,

Seven years ago, Governor Jay Nixon appointed me to the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission. It has been a wonderful experience. I will be forever grateful to the Governor (and to the Senate who confirmed me) for the opportunity to work with such a talented group of commissioners and MoDOT professionals in service to my fellow Missourians. Originally appointed to fill a vacated term expiring March 1, 2011, I have now served more than five years past that date, and a year past the usual six-year term. Over that time, I have worked with five different directors. At our June 8th meeting in my hometown of Kansas City, I announced my intention to step aside

from the Commission effective July 1, 2016.

In every endeavor in life, there is an appropriate season. It is never easy to step away from something one enjoys greatly; but there is also a danger of staying too long. The culture of the Commission is to rotate leadership each March and to give each Commissioner an opportunity to leave his or her own stamp on the organization. I had the unusual chance to serve two consecutive terms as chair (ending this March) and during that time, to work with three different directors, to initiate this column, to spearhead three transportation funding efforts, to launch the Road to Tomorrow initiative, to lead a national search for a new director, and to sound the call for the formation of a transportation federation to support transportation interests in the state.

Although my announcement may come as a surprise to some, it has been planned since last year. A July 1, 2016 date has allowed me to bring proper closure and to transition on many fronts:

- I was able to provide leadership on the Commission through the end of the most recent legislative session. Although there was no long-term funding achieved for transportation as I had hoped, the effort created much dialogue in the General Assembly and with the public. And, the General Assembly did:
 - eliminate the 2018 sunset on design-build legislation,
 - authorize platooning to enable MoDOT, as part of its Road to Tomorrow initiative, to test

blue tooth technology as a way of providing greater safety and fuel efficiency for large commercial vehicles,

- approve \$20 million in the next fiscal year for a cost-share program,
- allocate \$12.4 million for ports, and,
- fund Amtrak with \$9.6 million.
- MoDOT closed out its fiscal year for contractor awards at 7.7 percent under budget, or a savings of \$43 million.
- The Commission approved the new 2017 budget for approximately \$2.0 billion.
- Road to Tomorrow celebrated its one-year anniversary with the announcement of four possible pilot projects.
- I had an opportunity to see the conclusion of a national search, to participate in the hiring of Patrick McKenna as MoDOT director, and to serve as a resource to him during his first six months.
- I was able to provide mentoring and orientation for the three new Commissioners appointed within the last year.
- I had a chance over the last three months to assist with the transition of the chairmanship to Commissioner Gregg Smith and to support him in that position. And,
- In response to a call I issued in January 2015 for greater transportation advocacy and support, I have witnessed the formation and launching of the Mercury Alliance, a federation of transportation stakeholders.

MoDOT and the Commission are in good hands. I hope that I have left both in a better position than when I arrived and that some of my efforts will have a lasting impact.

There is never an easy time to say goodbye but the end of the fiscal year, the closure of the legislative session, the successful launch of a number of initiatives and the smooth transition of leadership, makes this an appropriate time for me to step aside.

The work of moving our state forward, however, must continue. For my part, I will continue to be a fierce advocate and spokesperson – in some fashion or form. I urge you to join me in that effort. If you have received the “View” it is because you are a thought leader – by virtue of your role in politics, business, community or media. Our success as a state depends on all of us persisting in the hard and often tedious process of moving our state forward beyond the lethargy and ambivalence that threatens to keep us from realizing the bright future that could be ours.

Since initiating the “View from the Chair” in March, 2014, I have written over 70 pieces intended to educate and advocate for transportation. I have also traveled the state to speak with Missourians from all walks of life. I am grateful for your response. Pundits had written off any progress on transportation predicting it would not be addressed by the General Assembly

nor debated in public, but your efforts have kept it alive. Special thanks to Senator Doug Libla (R-Poplar Bluff) who as chair of the Senate Transportation Committee led heroic efforts the last two legislative sessions to try to secure a long-term funding source. Although progress is frustratingly slow, all Missourians have too much at stake for efforts not to continue.

- We must find long-term funding solutions. Ranking 47th in funding for the 7th largest transportation system is unacceptable. Over 640 critical condition bridges and 1400 weight-limited bridges cannot be tolerated. MoDOT is spending down its cash reserves just to try to take care of the current system. There is overwhelming consensus in the state regarding the importance of transportation investment but not the solution. We must abandon any partisanship, ideology or parochialism that holds us back and commit ourselves to the patriotic values of our forebearers.
- We must develop an integrated transportation system. Our highways and bridges form the spine of that system but we cannot be prosperous unless we have a well-integrated system that connects all our modes of transportation: transit, rail, waterways, airports, bike and pedestrian. We must find dedicated funding to secure such a system.
- We must embrace technology and innovation. We must not fear the disruption it brings nor build walls around us to keep out new ways and ideas. The Road to Tomorrow holds great promise and affords a chance to place Missouri at the heart of the transportation revolution. Disruption brings opportunity. The Pony Express gave way to railroads; the horse and buggy to the automobile. We will either swim out to ride this wave in or be swept aside as it breaks over us. Missouri has the chance to be the Silicon Valley of transportation but we must move quickly, deliberately and fearlessly forward.

As we all look forward to the future, we do well to recall the words of President John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country [state] can do for you; ask what you can do for your country [state]."

Let's do all we can – together.

Stephen R. Miller
Commissioner

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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