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MoDOT Seeks Ideas for “Road to Tomorrow”

KANSAS CITY – The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission would like to see the nation’s oldest interstate highway reborn through innovation and technology.

Following its regular monthly meeting today at Union Station, the MHTC announced its intention to make Interstate 70 from Kansas City to St. Louis available to private industry, entrepreneurs and innovators as a laboratory for construction of the next generation of highways.

“Missouri has always been a hub for transportation technology and innovation – and our highways should be no exception,” said Gov. Jay Nixon. “As we continue to work to identify a solution to our transportation funding needs, I appreciate the Missouri Department of Transportation for taking a pro-active approach and embracing new technologies that will pave the way toward a brighter future.”

President Dwight D. Eisenhower made revitalizing the nation’s roads one of his highest priorities in the early 1950s. He envisioned a 40,000-mile network of interstate highways spanning the country. The system of high-speed, access-controlled freeways would facilitate national defense, increase safety, and provide for the efficient movement of goods and people.

“It’s only appropriate that the re-birth of the nation’s interstate system begin at its birthplace,” MHTC Chairman Stephen R. Miller said. “Missouri has always been at the heart of highway transportation – not only because the state’s geographic location puts it at the nation’s core, but also because of the role it’s played in the realization of Eisenhower’s dream.”

When President Eisenhower signed the legislation that authorized the interstate highway



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system in 1956, Missouri soon after became the first state to award an interstate construction contract for a section of Interstate 44 in Laclede County, and several months later became the first state to begin construction of an interstate when work began on I-70 in St. Charles.

Also, the man most credited with overseeing the realization of Eisenhower’s dream was Rex Whitton who began his career with the Missouri Highway Department in 1920 as a surveyor. He rose to chief engineer in 1951, served as president of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials in the fateful year of 1956, and then led the interstate effort during its critical years as administrator of the Federal Highway Administration from 1961 through 1966.

“We’re open to any and all ideas,” Miller said. “Just as MoDOT’s design-build projects over the last decade have produced insights and innovations not previously imagined, we are confident that offering free reign to human creativity and a designated site for implementation will generate the very best in American ingenuity.” He added that Americans are just now getting a glimpse of the new technologies that could serve as the basis for future highways: GPS systems, autonomous vehicles, alternative fuels, new construction materials, etc.

MoDOT Chief Engineer Ed Hassinger has appointed a team of MoDOT experts to solicit and evaluate ideas from the private sector. Those ideas need to not only focus on innovations in traffic engineering, design and construction, but also innovative ways of funding transportation infrastructure. He said the program will be called “Road to Tomorrow.” More information may be found at www.modot.org/road2tomorrow

“Even as we seek to boldly go where we have not gone before,” Miller said, we must stay firmly rooted in the realities of the moment – and that is that we have insufficient funding to preserve our current system. “Road to Tomorrow” may be years or decades away. In the meantime, a modest increase in fuel taxes is the most viable way to protect our current transportation assets.”

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