



Big ideas and the courage to pursue dreams have helped to propel our nation forward. During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln endorsed the vision of completing a transcontinental railroad. Many leaders felt the appropriate time for such a massive undertaking was not in the middle of an expensive war and, there were so many unanswered questions: Who would pay for it? Who would build it? Where would it begin and end? Could it be accomplished given the vast unsettled stretches of the West? And yet, the “Golden Spike” was driven on May 10, 1869 signifying the realization of the dream. Many consider it the greatest technological achievement of the nineteenth century.

On May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy proposed a similarly dramatic and ambitious goal – announcing the U.S. would send a man to the moon before the end of the decade. There was only one small problem. There was no plan, and NASA had no idea how to put a man on the moon. But eight years later, two Americans walked on the moon. The effort fired the imagination and fueled technological advances that propelled our nation forward.

After taking office in January, 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower made revitalizing the country’s roads one of his high priorities. Drawing on his experience as a young Army officer in 1919 when a transcontinental convoy from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco took 62 days, Eisenhower dreamed of 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. The interstate highway system was realized once establishment of The Highway Trust Fund provided the necessary revenues and new engineering designs and construction techniques enabled construction.

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 because of the role it’s played in the realization of Eisenhower’s dream. Once the President signed the legislation authorizing the interstate highway system in 1956, Missouri 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 highway when work began on I-70 in St. Charles.

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, rose to Chief Engineer in 1951, served as president of AASHTO in the fateful year of 1956, and then led the effort during its critical years as administrator of the Federal Highway Administration from 1961-66.



Almost 60 years later, our nation stands at a crossroads. That interstate highway system has exhausted its useful life and must be rebuilt from the ground up. But how should it be rebuilt and how will the reconstruction be financed? The world has changed in the last 60 years and it is clear that the rebuild must not be based on the technologies of the 1950s but the emerging technologies that will serve the 2020s and beyond.

We 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.

The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission has announced its intention to make Interstate 70 across the midsection of our state available to the nation and the world as the laboratory to construct the next generation of highways. Called “**Road to Tomorrow**,” the MHTC has issued a call for private industry, entrepreneurs and innovators to bring their products and ideas to the birthplace of the interstate highway and join with MoDOT in a collaboration to build the first section of the highway of the future. It’s only appropriate that the re-birth of the interstate highway begin at its birthplace.

To that end, MoDOT has assembled a multidisciplinary team to interface with its private partners. Just as Lincoln, Kennedy and Eisenhower had no idea of the details of how their dreams would be accomplished, Missouri has no preconceived plan. Just as design-build projects over the last decade have produced insights and innovations that could not have previously been imagined, the MHTC is confident that offering free reign to human creativity and a designated site for implementation will generate the very best in American ingenuity.

At a time when the nation and Missouri wrestle with how to fund reconstruction of this great interstate system, this effort must be focused not only on new technologies but new means of funding construction. For instance, will the highway of the future be subscription-based in order to provide additional services to benefit both commercial and passenger car use? New technologies offer new opportunities for funding.

Even as Missouri seeks to boldly go where we have not gone before, it must also keep its feet firmly rooted in the realities of the moment. “**Road to Tomorrow**” is years – maybe decades -- away. In the interim Missouri must continue to find ways to preserve its current system. A modest increase in the gas tax remains the most viable means to that end.