



# View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

## Interstate 70: Both Asset and Liability

June 1, 2015



Dear Reader,

Interstate 70 is a huge asset. It is the economic engine of our state, connecting our two largest cities. Some 61 percent of Missouri's residents, 49 percent of the state's employers and 63 percent of the state's jobs reside within 30 miles of the highway. Each year the I-70 corridor in Missouri carries more than 31.5 million tons of freight with a value in excess of \$59 billion.

Even for Missourians outside the I-70 corridor and for those who rarely if ever drive it, I-70 is tremendously important. It is a vital artery that fuels our entire state economy. It supports businesses and creates jobs that generate taxes to support programs that benefit Missourians throughout the state. And it is the backbone of a transportation system connecting Missourians to one another and our state to the rest of the nation. As I-70 goes, so goes our state economy.

I-70 has also become a huge liability. Its original pavement is shot, held together by years and years of overlays. The original pavement and base – some of which dates back to sections of old U.S. Route 40 that was built in the 1920s – has been pounded to bits by years of mounting traffic, heavier loads and increased tire pressures. Its bridges are nearing the end of their useful lives. It carries far more traffic than for what it was designed. Congestion is mounting. The increasing mix of long-haul trucks with cars makes people nervous and concerned for their safety.

And fixing it at a cost of \$2 billion-\$4 billion is beyond the state's means – certainly today and maybe forever – if something doesn't change. And, change has proved very, very difficult for our state. To put this in perspective, the fuel tax proposal this year in the General Assembly (which never came up for a final vote) would have raised only \$55 million annually – none of which would have gone to the reconstruction of I-70. In fact, \$55 million is only one third of what is

needed to keep our roads in their current condition.

MoDOT has studied I-70 for years and has developed several options for improvements. All have been cost-prohibitive and no momentum has been realized towards finding a solution to fund this endeavor – whether through conventional revenue streams (i.e. fuel tax, licensing fees and sales tax on vehicles) or through new possible sources (e.g. sales tax or tolling).

The need, though, remains to reconstruct and expand Missouri’s “Main Street.” Eighty percent of I-70 – the 200 miles from east of I-470 in Independence to I-64 near Wentzville – has already been environmentally cleared. It is just waiting to be rebuilt. But we are dead in the water. And this is a project that even if it were “green lighted” today will take almost a decade to design and build. In our state Capitol, we are mired in the same old debates and special interests that have paralyzed transportation funding in Missouri for over 20 years. As our neighboring states move forward, investing more in transportation, Missouri falls farther and farther behind.

I-70 – and indeed our whole state transportation system – once our greatest asset and a source of pride, has become our state’s largest unfunded liability.

Is there any hope? Many would say, “No.” After all, we are right now facing the potential loss of \$167 million federal dollars in 2017 and \$400 million each year thereafter and the General Assembly adjourned May 15 without legislation to address this problem even coming up for a vote. So, if a dramatic and immediate crisis of this magnitude fails to generate results, what possible hope is there for I-70?

For one possible answer to that question, I invite you to attend the next meeting of the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission on June 3 in Kansas City’s iconic Union Station. At 12:00 p.m. (following the MHTC meeting that begins at 9 a.m.), the **Commission will announce a new vision for addressing the transportation crisis in Missouri.** We would be delighted if you can join us for this historic announcement. For those unable to attend, stay tuned to your media outlets – and the next edition of the “View.”

There are no quick fixes. There is much work to be done by our leaders in Jefferson City – and by all Missourians. But sometimes looking at a problem from a different perspective can help all of us discover a road to tomorrow.

Never give up hope!

Stephen R. Miller  
Chairman

If you would like to communicate with the Commission, you can always reach us at [MHTC@modot.mo.gov](mailto: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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