



# View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

## The Problem Is Real When It Is In My Backyard

August 14, 2015



Dear Reader,

Two members of the Missouri General Assembly appeared before the Commission last Wednesday at its meeting in Jefferson City to plead on behalf of their constituents for improvements to bridges within their district. Hurray for them. The Commission can speak publicly about Missouri's 600 critical condition bridges, but there is nothing like hearing our elected officials describe passionately the hardship suffered by real people because Missouri won't invest in transportation.

Rep. Randy Pietzman (R-Troy) requested the Commission replace the Route H bridge crossing the Cuivre River in Lincoln County. In June, MoDOT was forced to post a 10- ton weight limit and a 40 mph speed limit as a result of a rapidly deteriorating deck on the 62-year-old bridge. Heavy vehicles such as emergency vehicles, school buses, trucks serving the local quarry and grain elevator, agricultural equipment and even MoDOT trucks used for snow removal can no longer safely cross the bridge and must make a 31-mile, one-way detour. Replacement of the Route H bridge, estimated at \$1.2 million, was planned to occur had Amendment 7 passed a year ago, but with no new funding source it is not a part of MoDOT's current five-year plan (2016- 2020).

Rep. Tim Remole (R-Excello) requested the Commission replace the Route T bridge crossing Thomas Hill Lake in Macon County. In February, the bridge was closed after an inspection uncovered severe deterioration to the bridge girders. Responding to concerns by some that the closure was merely a publicity stunt to press for more funding, Rep. Remole requested a boat tour from MoDOT to observe the deterioration for himself. The condition he observed shocked him and left little doubt regarding the prudence of closing the bridge, which was constructed in 1961. So that his constituents could understand the magnitude of the problem, he posted photos of what he saw on his website. Since then his website has had over 10,000 views.

The bridge closure causes a 25-mile detour forcing Macon County Emergency Services to adjust routing and response plans. A helicopter pad for air evacuation located on Route T east of the bridge is no longer accessible from the west. And, of course, regular motorists along with school buses, recreational visitors to Thomas Hill Lake, agricultural equipment and MoDOT trucks must all make lengthy detours. The replacement of the Route T bridge, estimated at \$1 million, had not previously appeared on any needs list because previous inspections had not revealed the damage.

Both representatives asked excellent questions including: “Why can’t MoDOT find the money to fix my bridge? It is only around a million dollars which is not that much in the overall MoDOT budget.” It is a fair question. And, it is a question that the other 161 representatives and 34 senators could all ask. All of them have critical bridges located within their districts. All the money for 2016 has been programmed -- allocated to urgent projects that have been prioritized through local elected officials and planning organizations most knowledgeable of regional needs. Which project would they have the Commission pull off the list?

Even with the unanticipated revenue from an improving economy which allowed MoDOT to avoid the loss of federal funds, the dollars available for addressing transportation needs continues to plummet. Even though MoDOT will meet its federal match there will be tens of millions of dollars less in 2017 than in 2016 – just as 2016 is tens of millions of dollars less than 2015. Plans for 2017- 2020 remain fiscally restrained. The Commission is not going to place a project on the “list” – the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), unless it is certain there will be funding to build the project. The Route H and Route T bridges are on the state’s 26,000-mile supplemental system and at the current time neither bridge is part of the current five-year plan.

Thanks to Representatives Pietzman and Remole for highlighting the problem and putting a human face on it. The “dog days” of August are a perfect time for legislators to do just as Representatives Pietzman and Remole did – take a tour with their local MoDOT engineer; see for themselves; post the photos on their websites; discuss with their constituents; and commit to do something.

Let’s get going!

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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