



# View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

## Safety is a Casualty of Funding Shortage

August 26, 2015



Dear Reader,

Recently my wife and I, as many other parents do each August, took our 18- and 20-year-old daughters to college. For us, this year was a passage as we now find ourselves as “empty nesters.” In the future, they will be visitors rather than residents in the home we created for them. While we thrill at our daughters’ growth to adulthood, their accomplishments and the future ahead, we also worry about their safety and well-being.

I worry in particular. The greatest threat to my daughters’ lives is the very thing their father has responsibility for – Missouri roads. For someone my age the leading cause of death is heart disease followed closely by cancer. But for my children, in the prime of life, it is the automobile.

I was reminded of this again powerfully when Sgt. Bill Lowe of the Missouri State Highway Patrol appeared before the Commission this month. He spoke of the emotional toll it took on him the first time he looked at the lifeless body of a person killed on our highways.

If I am tenacious and relentless in pressing for funding for transportation, it is because I know that increased funding will allow us to save lives – to save the life of someone’s son or daughter, even my own. I am reminded of it every month when I receive the report of deaths on our Missouri highways – approximately 770 lives last year – down from over 1,200 in 2005. This year, fatalities on our roadways are up 13 percent. The numbers are staggering. Sadly we have grown almost immune to the figures. We seem to have accepted them as the cost of mobility. But it doesn’t have to be this way.

It is no mere coincidence that an increased construction budget from 2005-2010 coincided with a dramatic reduction in fatalities. Funding saves lives. It allowed us to deploy more safety devices on our roads such as median cable barriers, rumble strips, wider stripes and larger signs. MoDOT has the technology and ability to make our roads safer in concert with law enforcement, emergency medical services and educational programs. It lacks only the money to do more.

MoDOT's system-wide approach to making safety improvements has proven successful, but continuing on that path will be difficult in the future with insufficient funding. A greater investment in transportation could allow MoDOT to place more median cable barriers to help prevent head-on crossover collisions on our major highways; add shoulders and rumble stripes to two-lane highways to reduce the number of run-off-the-road accidents; use high-friction surface treatments to improve traction during wet weather on problematic curves; and build more J-turns to improve intersection safety on four-lane expressways. (J-turns reduce the number of conflict points at an intersection by constructing what functions much like a left-turn lane permitting turning cars to get out of the flow of traffic – and they are much cheaper than building a grade-separated interchange.)

What does it take to motivate us to invest in transportation? Every year that passes without action costs lives. You never stop worrying as a parent. There is so much outside our control. But making our highways a safer place is within our control – if only we have the will to act.

Let's get going!

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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