



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Headquarters

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JERRY M. CONLEY, Director

April 4, 2001

ADK - 10/22/01

Mr. Henry Hungerbeeler
Missouri Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 270
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Henry:

Rebuilding Missouri's Interstate 70 is important to all Missourians and to the State's natural resources. At the very least, it's an additional corridor 150 feet wide and 200 miles long—which amounts to over 3600 acres. It will affect hundreds of rivers and creeks, habitats for a wide range of species and a "viewscape" of hundreds of square miles. The Conservation Department appreciates the opportunity we've had to participate in planning discussions to date, including a current series of meetings designed to wrap up your Tier One Environmental Impact Study.

While plans are still very general, my staff is optimistic that Conservation needs can be met while MoDOT improves this critical but aging component of Missouri's transportation system. We look forward to helping as more specific design details develop in the Tier Two.

One suggestion we'd make is that Tier Two studies include a look for ways the whole project can be managed to improve both natural resource and the scenic values. Transportation enhancement for scenic and natural resource values is a federal funding priority, and is funded separately from highway construction. While smaller projects, may explore enhancements after routing and design, a project of this scale suggests a proactive approach. With MoDOT investing multiple millions in what will ultimately be a \$3 billion infrastructure investment, it makes sense to make enhancements a distinct but integral piece of the design and planning.

Agencies like Conservation, Natural Resources and Tourism have a stake in a project of this scale. Not only will the highway have direct effects on resources, its overall appearance can impact millions of our potential customers annually. Interstate 70 is the avenue by which much of the rest of the nation glimpses Missouri. It is worth some serious thought to design in such a way that a positive impression of Missouri is left with every traveler, who may base his or her next tourist, camping or hunting destination based on the impression left by this corridor.

Following are some possible enhancements to I-70 that could be explored in the next phase of planning:

- Management of shoulders and medians can emphasize native plants and landscapes or contribute to exotic propagation and weed problems.
- Wildlife will interact with roads and drivers, and specific design features should be considered to encourage viewing opportunities but minimize accident risk.

COMMISSION

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Plattsburg

HOWARD L. WOOD
Bonne Terre

Mr. Hungerbeeler

April 4, 2001

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- Adjacent areas managed by public agencies can enhance the view from the highway, provide restful stops, or show people Missouri's nature at its best. The highway system can encourage people to explore, enjoy and relax in our beautiful state, not just find a way across it.
- Rest stops can provide information, inspiration and enticement to enjoy parts of Missouri not on the road itself.
- Partnerships may be developed to protect some of the more striking viewsapes along I-70 for the enjoyment of future generations.
- Damage to resources during construction have to be considered on a site-by-site basis, but a mitigation program could be considered on a larger scale.

I am not sure that any of the above possibilities can happen, but the scale of this project makes them worth considering. I appreciate your consideration in the matter, and offer the help of my staff to consider those possibilities if they make sense to you.

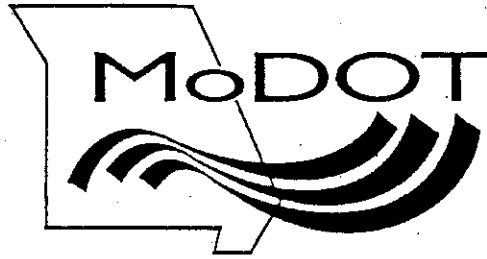
Sincerely,


JERRY M. CONLEY
DIRECTOR

c: Commissioner Randy Herzog
Commissioner Ronald J. Stites
Commissioner Anita B. Gorman
Commissioner Howard L. Wood

I-70 Improvement Study
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April 25, 2001

Mr. Jerry Conley
Director
Missouri Department of Conservation
P.O. Box 180
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180

RECEIVED

MAY 07 2001

HNTB-KCMO

Dear Jerry:

Subject: Interstate 70 Reconstruction

I have your letter dated April 4 regarding the concepts and plans we have regarding the reconstruction and improvement of Interstate 70 across much of Missouri. I was pleased to learn that your staff is optimistic that our respective needs can be addressed as we look at this major effort. Fortunately, the need for an investment in I-70 is obvious to all of us who travel the route. Unfortunately, our resources for such work are stretched. However, this does not preclude the value of working in partnership to accomplish mutual goals and goals which we hope are not opposed. Our department is striving to establish partnerships with your department and other state agencies such as the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the Missouri Division of Tourism that allow our objectives to develop jointly as we address our needs on I-70. Previous meetings with our agencies have revealed efforts where joint partnerships may yield results that benefit the citizens of Missouri as well as travelers passing through the state. Joint development opportunities allow for greater understanding of our agencies' missions, greater ownership for the products of our efforts, and partnerships that perhaps generate a product better than the sum of its parts.

The bullet points in your letter outline possible enhancements to I-70 worth examining. In fact, some of those have been discussed as the I-70 study has developed. Also, on April 12, Mark Kross, our assistant to the director of project development and HNTB, our consultant doing the First Tier EIS study of I-70, were able to meet with your Regional Coordination Team (RCT) and the Central Unit Coordinating Team (UCT) at Rocheport to offer details on the effort and to take questions. The discussion, lasting about an hour, was beneficial for us all especially because your unit managers covering the stretch of I-70 from Warrenton to Blue Springs (or most of the I-70 study length) were present. We hope it yields dividends as your staff considers environmental concerns they have, observations on transportation matters and opportunities for joint efforts.

Referring to your bullet points on some possible enhancements to I-70 that could be explored in the next phase of planning, we discussed the following possibilities:

- “Management of shoulders and medians can emphasize native plants and landscapes or contribute to exotic propagation and weed problems.” Management of our rights of way is a costly and often dangerous task for our forces. The establishment of natural communities and landscapes with your professional assistance and perhaps with joint maintenance would assist our respective agencies fulfill our missions with a shared beneficial effect. Your managers suggested linear corridors along I-70 with prairie, riverine, and upland vegetation that would showcase Missouri ecosystems. Possibly, a pleasing travel experience will make drivers less stressed with a concomitant reduction in accidents, injuries and fatalities.
- “Wildlife will interact with roads and drivers, and specific design features should be considered to encourage viewing opportunities but minimize accident risk.” Our staff indicated that information about wildlife crossings would help us consider this issue. Perhaps we shall be able to provide natural cover beneath certain bridges that occur where wildlife passage occurs to keep the accident rates reduced. Viewing opportunities might be possible, provided there is wildlife to be seen and we can engineer some means to get travelers off the interstate for viewing opportunities.
- “Adjacent areas managed by public agencies can enhance the view from the highway, provide restful stops, or show people Missouri's nature at its best. The highway system can encourage people to explore, enjoy and relax in our beautiful state, not just find a way across it.” This concept is germinating with discussions related to the Rocheport/ Overton Bottoms I-70 crossing of the Missouri River. Such a concept might be expanded to cover the length of I-70.
- “Rest stops can provide information, inspiration and enticement to enjoy parts of Missouri not on the road itself.” Our discussions with a host of agencies, including yours, the Department of Natural Resources, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US Army Corps of Engineers, other local partners and the Missouri Division of Tourism are yielding the concept of a Central Missouri Welcome Center near Rocheport. Shared interests mean that many stories can be told. Shared management of such a facility would benefit the partners. Our December 2000 “Missouri Interstate Rest Area Plan” now includes an interagency interpretive rest area conceptually in the Rocheport area.
- “Partnerships may be developed to protect some of the more striking viewsapes along I-70 for the enjoyment of future generations.” We have discussed this and agree that some focal points include the crossings at the Loutre, Missouri, and Lamine Rivers. If we have an opportunity to work with other agencies and private landowners in these areas, and elsewhere along the I-70 corridor, to maintain and/or establish natural views, then this objective might be realized.

Mr. Jerry Conley


April 25, 2001

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- "Damage to resources during construction have to be considered on a site-by-site basis, but a mitigation program could be considered on a larger scale." Although early in the process for site-specific discussions of mitigation, the concept of coordinated and combined mitigation has merit. That would especially be true if management of such larger mitigation areas was assumed by agencies such as the Missouri Department of Conservation and/or the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Monitoring and management of natural areas is a responsibility MoDOT has to fulfill, but we feel that the state, its environment and the citizens benefit more if natural resource agencies have a key role in that maintenance. For example, we are looking at such opportunities with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources regarding wetland mitigation banks we might establish to address transportation impacts and which the Missouri Department of Natural Resources can maintain.

I appreciate the offer of assistance regarding the development of sensitive environmental features for I-70. As you can see, our agencies are working together to achieve this objective. I hope that such efforts on I-70 set a framework for partnerships on future projects. I am a firm believer that cooperating to achieve our joint objectives, though difficult at times, can yield a better product for our citizens. I appreciate the opportunity to hear your thoughts about our efforts.

Sincerely,


Henry Hungerbeeler
Director

hh/msk-pd

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Copies: Mr. Steve Mahfood - MoDNR
Mr. Chris Jennings - Tourism
Mr. Jerry Mugg - HNTB ✓

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