



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Missouri Falls Further Behind; Its Bridges are in Trouble

March 12, 2015



Dear «GreetingLine»

At our meeting this week in Jefferson City, the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission heard from Missouri Department of Transportation Director Dave Nichols that February 24 was a great day for transportation.

Unfortunately, it was a great day for the State of Iowa – not the State of Missouri.

February 24 was the day the Iowa legislature passed and Governor Terry Branstad signed a 10-cent fuel tax increase that went into effect March 1. Iowa's gasoline tax is now 31 cents per gallon, with diesel at 32.5 cents per gallon. The increase will generate about \$215 million per year for Iowa roads and bridges – 48 percent will go to maintain the state's 9,000 miles of roads. The remaining 52 percent goes to cities and counties.

Meanwhile Missouri continues to look for a solution to its insufficient transportation funding dilemma – trying to take care of a 34,000-mile system with a 17-cent per gallon fuel tax. It just doesn't work.

We heard a presentation yesterday from Louisiana Mayor Bart Niedner. He told us just how important the Champ Clark Bridge is to his community. The 87-year-old span carries U.S. Route 54 over the Mississippi River and requires constant maintenance to keep it open. It's at the top of MoDOT's priority list for replacement, but we don't have the funds available to do so. The bridge is just one bad inspection away from being closed, which would result in a two-hour detour. The mayor detailed the devastating effect this would have not only on Louisiana but on the entire

region. He described businesses that would close, agriculture opportunities that would be impaired and families that would be separated. The project will cost \$60 million, split equally between Missouri and Illinois. Illinois has its share of the money, but sadly, Missouri does not.

We also heard from State Bridge Engineer Dennis Heckman who told us about five state bridges that are closed today – and more are headed for closure unless there is new funding. Photos of Missouri's closed bridges may be found at <http://www.modot.org/Bridges/>. One shows a large hole in the bridge deck to daylight, likely caused by a truck carrying a load above the restricted weight limit. Director Nichols remarked, "What if a school bus had been following right behind?"

Dennis also showed us maps of the state's 600 bridges that are in critical condition and the 1,400 that have weight restrictions. In 10 years time this number is estimated to grow to approximately 1,500, with as many as 90 closures. Maps of our bridges with critical needs and those that are load-posted may be found at the website that is linked above. The Director calls them "measles maps."

If a transportation funding bill were to pass in the Missouri General Assembly this session and be signed by the Governor, the Champ Clark Bridge at Louisiana would be replaced. The other four could be fixed and reopened. And we could get to work addressing the state's other bridge needs. Dennis advised us that in 2014, MoDOT estimated the cost to repair or replace our deficient bridges at \$5 billion. That price tag will only grow as we are forced to defer maintenance. We must begin now to chip away at this problem.

If nothing happens this legislative session, which ends May 15, hundreds of millions of precious federal fuel tax dollars that were paid by Missourians will be lost to other states that have adequate state match revenue – like Iowa.

We cannot let that happen. **NOW** is the time to act. If the General Assembly does not act this session hundreds of millions of our federal tax dollars will be lost forever; money that could be used to safeguard the livelihood of Louisiana and keep our bridges open and safe.

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.

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