



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Tolling Can Help I-70 But Won't Solve Current Funding Crisis

March 30, 2015



Dear Readers,

In December 2014, Governor Jay Nixon wrote to me and requested that MoDOT provide to him a report before the end of the year examining the feasibility of tolling as a way to fund the reconstruction of I-70. The report, delivered to the Governor and leaders in the Missouri General Assembly, concludes that tolling is a viable piece to the transportation funding puzzle and deserves further investigation. The Governor echoed those sentiments in his "State of the State" address when he urged the General Assembly to give tolling serious consideration.

Since then some have suggested that tolling I-70 might solve our transportation funding problems. I wish that it was that easy. It is not. Tolling will not solve the current crisis.

I like to put highway funding needs into three categories:

- funding to maintain the current system and avoid the loss of hundreds of millions of federal fuel tax dollars paid by Missourians,
- funding to rebuild I-70 from the ground up, and
- funding to address those long-term transportation needs – including other modes of transportation like transit, rail, ports and airports – identified in last years "On The Move" campaign which would have been addressed by Amendment 7.

We need to keep working towards a solution to all three of these transportation funding needs. All deserve prompt attention but, in the order of priority, we must first address our \$160 million gap that threatens the loss of hundreds of millions of federal tax dollars and the deterioration of our current system.

It's been suggested that money now spent every year on I-70 would be freed for other projects, since proceeds from the toll operation would pay for the initial construction. Today, MoDOT spends \$50-60 million annually to take care of I-70. That includes resurfacing, bridge repairs, pothole patching, safety repairs, snow removal, mowing, litter pickup, etc.

Depending on how a tolled facility was established, some of that money might be saved for other projects. But, any potential savings would be years down the road, because we'd still have to perform those functions during the time that the new I-70 was being constructed. Tolls could not be charged until the facility was completed and fully functioning. It is estimated that even if the General Assembly passed the necessary enabling legislation this session, the procurement process could take two-three years and construction could take another 5-7 years. As a result, even if we started today, any savings could be a decade away.

Tolling deserves serious consideration and if MoDOT had enabling legislation, it is prepared to promptly commence the process of rebuilding I-70, but no one should consider tolling as a viable option to address the current funding crisis. The best vehicle for solving the \$160 million funding gap is a modest increase in the gas tax – a proposal that is already being discussed in the Senate.

The time for action is now. 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. 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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