



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Missouri, We Have A Problem

May 27, 2015



Dear «GreetingLine»

“Houston, we have a problem.” Those historic words uttered by Astronaut Jim Lovell in 1970 following a catastrophic event that disabled the Apollo 13 spacecraft, seemingly stranding it in space, have proven to be one of the great understatements of all time. Well, today in Missouri, we too have a problem: At the current time we have no way to save our transportation system and no plan to avoid the loss of hundreds of millions of Missouri federal tax dollars.

The engineers at NASA's Mission Control had to huddle together to improvise with the hope of finding some way – any way – to bring the crew home safely and rescue America's space program. In a similar manner, the Commission has asked MoDOT senior management to explore options for Missouri's transportation system. The odds are not good – but we have no choice but to try.

NASA faced a complex problem with a very uncertain outcome. It not only had to find a way to restore life support to the command module in a short period of time, it had to then find a way to bring the craft and crew safely home. This involved completely rethinking – and ultimately reconfiguring – the lunar lander and the command module. We all know how this story ended: American ingenuity and technology prevailed. From one perspective, the Apollo 13 mission ended in failure, but the successful effort of returning the astronauts alive inspired the nation and the United States went on to four more successful manned landings on the moon.

Missouri faces its own crisis. Over the last several months, we have focused attention on the lack of funding that has caused the Commission to call for implementation of Missouri's 325 System which will result in the reduction of service on 26,000 miles of highway and 6,300 bridges. We have also sounded the alarm that \$167 million dollars of Missouri federal tax dollars is at risk in 2017, and \$400 million per year thereafter. A six-cent increase in Missouri's fuel tax would have addressed this problem, but the General Assembly failed to even bring to a vote legislation that

would have provided the first third.

During this effort we completely ignored another problem that looms large: the reconstruction of Interstate 70. Remember that the six-cent fuel tax increase to plug Missouri's \$160 million gap would not have addressed the rebuilding of I-70 – nor the vast majority of the Amendment 7 projects. An additional six cents would only have maintained the status quo.

I-70 is the economic engine of our state, connecting our two largest cities. Within 30 miles of the highway is located 61 percent of Missouri's residents, 49 percent of the state's employers and 63 percent of the state's jobs. Each year Missouri's I-70 corridor carries more than 31.5 million tons of freight with a value in excess of \$59 billion.

We've known for years that I-70 needs to be reconstructed from the ground up with a minimum of three lanes in each direction. But it's an expensive proposition – \$2 billion or more. It's a problem that will not go away.

So, Missouri has a huge problem. And we have no ready solution. The problem is much, much more than the recent failure by the General Assembly to enact a two-cent increase in the fuel tax. Those two cents would have made only a small dent in the problem, but it would have been a start – and it would have been evidence that we have the will as a state to tackle this problem head on and to begin to address it bit by bit. But that did not happen and the magnitude of the overall problem and its threat to the well-being of our state looms large.

This is going to require all of us – not just MoDOT – but legislators, chambers of commerce, businesses, industry groups, local governments and common citizens to put our heads together – just as the NASA engineers did 45 years ago – to find a way to salvage this mission and to set our state back on the right course.

Let's get after it,

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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