

Weekly Report
Week of 4-22

By: Sen. Matt Bartle
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Earlier this session I sent out a survey to constituents of the 8th Senatorial District to gather opinions on several issues facing the Missouri Legislature this year. I have received a great response with over 3600 people taking the time to reply. I really appreciate folks taking time to send their survey back to me.

While this survey was not intended to be a scientifically accurate poll, the responses have been tabulated and the results were surprising. One of the questions in the survey related to the use of toll roads to improve Missouri's transportation system. Sixty-three percent of those who replied to the survey would support the use of tolls in some form (14 percent supported tolls only for new projects and 49 percent supported tolls to improve existing roads or to build new roads). This would be a drastic change from Missouri's current funding plan, which relies heavily on gasoline taxes and federal dollars.

Toll roads have not been widely used in Missouri as they are in many states. However, the technology to operate toll roads has developed to the point that some of the problems have been addressed. Systems now in operation allow for local motorists to pass through toll gates without stopping. The charge is deducted electronically from an account prepaid by the driver.

Missouri's roads and bridges are in desperate shape and we are now in a position that billions of dollars need to be invested in order to provide the kind of transportation system we need. It is estimated that it would take up to \$3 billion to turn I-70 into a modern 6 lane interstate highway. This is not even counting the billions of dollars in investment needed elsewhere. While the cost for improving our roads is high, one advantage of the toll system is that much of the cost would be paid by out-of-state drivers who are merely passing through on one of Missouri's major interstates.

This issue will spark a serious policy debate around the State and many people are not sold on the idea of toll roads. Among other concerns, some citizens object to paying the added costs tolls would undoubtedly bring.

Under the Missouri Constitution, in order for toll roads to become a reality there must be a vote of the people, not simply an act of the legislature. A resolution in the Senate Transportation Committee that would have put the issue to a vote of the people has not been acted on and will likely not pass this session. There is little doubt this issue will generate substantial controversy but it is a bold alternative to the current inadequate funding scheme and one that the response to my survey shows is being seriously considered by many voters.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us. Also, you can read any of the bills I

file on my website at:

www.senate.mo.gov/bartle. Thank you again for making it possible for me to serve in the Missouri Senate.