

### **Amendment 3: Increasing Funds for Missouri's Roads**

In less than two weeks residents of Missouri will go to the polls to cast their vote in a host of political races including picking a president, a governor, a secretary of state and many others. But the November 2<sup>nd</sup> ballot will also put before the voters another issue of considerable importance. Amendment 3 asks if the State's law should be changed to require that certain funds from vehicle sales taxes and gasoline taxes be earmarked for the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT).

It may come as a surprise to many that sending funds from the gas tax to MoDOT is even a question on which we need to vote. Many reasonably assume that the money paid on every gallon of gas purchased at the pump already goes to improve our roads and bridges, but this is not the case. While under current law a portion of this tax does go to MoDOT, Amendment 3 will help direct more of this source of revenue towards fixing our transportation system. Amendment 3 would also require that millions of dollars raised from sales taxes on vehicles go to MoDOT.

A trip down Missouri's roads reminds us of the often embarrassing condition of our transportation system. The State needs every dollar it can scrape together to address this serious problem. While Amendment 3 will not fix all our problems it will provide a significant amount of extra money for transportation and that is a step in the right direction.

Some have objected to Amendment 3 on the grounds that the funds that are currently sent to the State's general revenue fund and parceled out for various programs will be transferred to MoDOT, causing serious gaps in the budgets of other agencies. In response, there are two things to keep in mind. First, the State must always prioritize where it spends its limited revenue. There will never be enough money for any State to fund every program to the degree that everyone would like. Limited resources will always require prioritization and improving our transportation system is a compelling need. In my view, along with providing funding for a quality education for Missouri's kids, improving our roads and bridges should be one of our greatest priorities.

The second point to remember is that nationally we are entering a time of greater economic expansion. We have weathered an economic downturn and the future is looking brighter. I believe there will be continued long-term improvement in Missouri's economy that will undoubtedly mean an increase in the revenue flowing into State coffers. As these new funds become available they can be used by the legislature to fill in gaps in worthwhile programs left as dollars are shifted to transportation priorities.

We are at an important point in setting the future course of our State. We know that our roads need serious and immediate attention and we now have an opportunity to reorder our priorities to ensure that we see meaningful progress in this area. Amendment 3 is a start. Let me also point out that I will be filing legislation to let the people decide whether to allow MoDOT to set up reasonably priced tolls on Interstate 70 (although I do not support the \$20 toll recently mentioned in a MoDOT study). Now is the time to stop talking about solutions and to take decisive action. Tolling is an idea whose time has come.

Finally, in addition to passing Amendment 3 and giving MoDOT the authority to establish tolls on I-70, as we watch our economy begin to grow I want to make sure that the State does not again drift into the rut of immediately spending practically every dollar it takes in. As I mentioned in an earlier column, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, I will be proposing a plan to establish the “Missouri Savings Account Fund” that will require that a percentage of all growth in Missouri’s budget be set aside in an interest-bearing account to be used when the economy enters its next cyclical downturn. Unless the State gets its financial house in order, it is hard to see how we’ll ever have the funds to move ahead with a significantly increased commitment in the budget to major improvements to our roads and bridges.

It is time to show that we’re serious about improving Missouri’s transportation system. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> let’s take the first step and pass Amendment 3.

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](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us) or by phone at (888) 711-9278.