



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

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is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**State Sen. Matt Bartle Introduces Legislative Package
To Allow Voters to Consider Limited Use of Toll Roads in Missouri**

JEFFERSON CITY — State Sen. Matt Bartle, R-Lee's Summit, has introduced a legislative package that would give voters the opportunity to change Missouri's constitution to allow the limited use of toll roads to fund needed highway and bridge improvements in the state.

Bartle, who recently polled constituents in his legislative district, said citizens are concerned about the condition of Missouri's roads and should be given the opportunity to decide if limited tolling on specific roads and bridges should become part of Missouri's transportation strategy.

"More than 60 percent of the constituents I surveyed listed deteriorating roads as a main concern and would support tolling," Bartle said. "I think voters should have the chance to speak out on whether they want to allow the limited use of toll roads to build and improve specific sections of roads and bridges."

The package proposed by Bartle contains SJR 11, which if approved by the General Assembly, would allow voters to make constitutional changes to allow the use of limited toll highways and bridges.

The transportation package also includes SB 31, which would make corresponding statutory changes to implement the limited toll system, if approved by voters.

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“Key problem areas are known to lawmakers—and are also well-known to the motorists who drive our highways,” Bartle said. “Extreme traffic areas, such as I-70, are likely to be among the first targeted for upgrades if voters choose this method of highway maintenance.”

While bonds were used in the early half of the 20th century to build Missouri’s initial system of paved roadways, the state since has traditionally used a pay-as-you go method of fuel taxes and vehicle sales taxes to build and maintain highway and bridge systems.

“Missouri currently ranks third-last in the nation in road quality, and second-last in bridge conditions,” Bartle said. “It is clearly evident that citizens must be given new opportunities to consider in how to best meet our state’s modern transportation needs.”

In the 1950’s, Missouri expanded its paved-road system to extend hard-surface state roads to within a few miles of virtually every home in the state. In 1956, Congress approved the Federal Aid Highway Act, which began construction of an interstate highway system whose construction began near St. Louis. That plan called for the super highways to be built by the federal government, then turned over to the states for repair and maintenance. Ironically, the federal system was projected to last 40 years—less time than what was actually needed to complete it.

In the 1960s, the state took over the maintenance responsibility for many county roads, paving once-gravel surfaces that counties has constructed and maintained. While these changes improved road quality, they imposed a dramatic demand on the state to maintain what has become one of the nation’s largest systems of state roadways.

“Adequately funding our highways system is among the top public policy challenges facing our state today,” Bartle said. “Citizens should have a full range of choices in determining our state’s transportation policy future.

The transportation challenge was complicated in 1992, when a 6-cent fuel tax was phased in to finance a 15-year highway plan that promised to provide a four-lane highway system to every town in Missouri with more than 2,000 residents. The promises greatly exceeded the ability of the tax increase to deliver road projects, and the Highway Commission eventually scrapped the program.

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The failure of the 15-year plan resulted in a sharp drop in confidence among citizens and lawmakers regarding the state's highway department. A number of accountability measures have since been passed by the Legislature to address concerns with Missouri's system of managing its many transportation systems.

In August 2002, voters soundly rejected Proposition B, which would have increased state sales and use taxes by one-half cent and state fuel taxes by 4-cents per gallon to boost revenues for highway and transportation purposes.

"With the rejection of Proposition B, the voters clearly stated that a major tax increase to broadly fund transportation was not acceptable," Bartle said. "Now, it is time to explore other, more specific options."

Bartle said last month's approval of Constitutional Amendment No. 3, which stops the diversion of transportation funds from non-transportation uses, is a step toward providing proper funding for Missouri's transportation needs. "While Amendment No. 3 is a major step in correcting a problem, it is not a panacea that will meet our state's long-term transportation needs" Bartle said.

While it is a long road to a limited-toll system in Missouri, Bartle said that if approved by lawmakers and voters, the proposal would create needed revenues to repair roads or to issue revenue bonds to finance construction of major road and bridge projects.

"This proposal gives voters a new option to consider — and it is an option that directly connects usage fees to the projects that are funded. Motorists — from any state — who use the roads and bridges pay for the roads and bridges," Bartle said. "It is not a new concept, yet I believe it is an idea worthy of final judgment by the lawmakers — and voters — of the state of Missouri."

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