

Toll Road Legislation is the Answer to Interstate 70 Renovations

Missouri has heard lots of talk about expanding Interstate 70 to six lanes across the state, but real solutions – solutions that include funding for this \$3 billion project – are elusive. Missouri needs a long-term plan for I-70 expansion, and that is why I have once again introduced a measure that will authorize reasonable tolls on the highway to counter high traffic and dangerous driving conditions.

Since construction began on I-70 near St. Louis approximately 50 years ago, Missouri has not significantly updated the highway's infrastructure. Although we pour millions of dollars each year into repaving efforts, Missourians and other motorists essentially are driving on the same highway that was built in the 1950s.

With an increasing population and our growing reliance on major roadways for transportation, traffic has grown significantly on I-70. As a result, we continue to inflict more and more damage on the highway, which is becoming increasingly dangerous for drivers. Patching up holes is not going to cut it anymore.

I-70 is in desperate need of a total overhaul. However, a tight state budget makes unlikely the possibility of a program funding comprehensive infrastructural improvements. The Missouri Department of Transportation estimates a total cost of \$3 billion to widen I-70 to six lanes from Kansas City to St. Louis. Some estimates project that current state revenues would take decades to completely fund such a project. It is clear the state simply cannot cover that cost in a reasonable time span. We need a quicker solution, and toll roads would allow us renovate Missouri's most vital roadway more quickly and efficiently.

My legislation to allow for tolling on I-70 will ensure that funding for roadway improvements is more fairly distributed to those who travel on the interstate. For example, Kansans using I-70 in Missouri do not pay for road projects in our state unless they buy gas here. However, Missourians who drive on the Kansas Turnpike stop at the toll booths to pay their share. Furthermore, the tractor trailers that tear up the highway on their way through Missouri will also pay for their use of the road. By instituting a pay-for-use system, the cost of construction on I-70 will be distributed among those who make renovation necessary.

For locals who regularly use I-70, modern technologies will allow for minimal delays and fair pricing. Billing accounts and electronic passes minimize delays at toll stations by allowing regulars to quickly scan their e-passes and drive through. Meanwhile, "distance-based pricing" requires motorists only to pay for how far they drive. This method keeps drivers from having to pay a flat fee if they want to use the highway for a short distance.

Using tolls on I-70 is a win-win for taxpayers and travelers. Missouri taxpayers will more fairly pay for I-70 upgrades, and all travelers get a safer highway with less traffic to navigate.

Missourians have long looked for solutions to the problems on I-70. The answer has been with us all along.

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 or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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