

Pete Rahn
State of Transportation Address
Jefferson City, Missouri
February 2, 2005

Lt. Governor,

Mr. Speaker,

Mr. President Pro Tem,

Distinguished State Officials,

Members of the 93rd General Assembly, Members of the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission, and
Citizens of Missouri:

Transportation is vital to the great state of Missouri. I'm sure you're impressed that I have figured that out in just four and a half short months.

Transportation allows the lifeblood of commerce to flow to every extremity of America and the world.

- A It accounts for 11 percent of our nation's Gross **Domestic** Product - second only to health care.
- A U.S. households spend up to 19 percent of their income on transportation - second only to housing.
- A Nine cents of every dollar spent by consumers on manufactured goods is for transportation.
- A 14 cents of every dollar spent by consumers on agricultural products is for transportation.

Unfortunately, the factors that take a toll on this essential system keep increasing. And it's important to note, our highways and even the Interstates were never designed to accommodate the types and volumes of traffic they encounter today.

- A Large trucks on our highways increased by 132 percent between 1990 and 2000.
- A The growth of "just-in-time inventory" with its dependence on rapid shipping will cause freight tonnage on our highways to increase by 70 percent in the next 15 years.
- A International trade, which obviously depends on transportation infrastructure, grew from 900 billion dollars in 1990 to 2.2 trillion dollars in 2000.
- A The average American spends 443 hours annually behind the wheel of an automobile.

Nationally, these things have stretched our transportation system to its limit.

- A 46 percent of our National Highway System and 90 percent of our urban interstates will be beyond capacity by 2020.
- A Congestion in our urban areas accounts for 4.5 billion hours of delay and 6.8 billion gallons of wasted fuel every year.

So, what about Missouri?

- A We have the nation's third worst pavement conditions.
- A Of Missouri's major highways, 54 percent of the pavement is in fair to poor condition.
- A We are fourth in the nation in the number of deficient bridges on our system.
- A Additionally, I-70 is in a state of near crisis. I-70, now almost 50 years old, was designed for a 20-year lifespan.
- A This problem promises to get worse. Traffic on I-70 is expected to double by the year 2030
- A Meanwhile, I-44 is an I-70 just waiting to happen. We observe many of the same problems on this vital interstate as on I-70.

These troubling conditions are easy to understand when you consider that:

- A We have the seventh largest highway system in the country.
- A In fact, you could combine all of the state highways in Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas and it still would not equal the size of Missouri's system.
- A Yet we are 42nd in the amount of money we spend on that system per mile.
- A Of the eight states surrounding Missouri, only Arkansas spends less per mile of highway than we do.
- A Our fuel tax is tied for the 10th lowest compared to all other states.
- A In fact, our fuel tax of 17 cents -adjusted for inflation - is worth just over 8 cents today in purchasing power.
- A For example, the first fuel tax from 1924 of 2 cents would have to be 21 cents today to buy as much.
- A At the same time, we rank seventh in the number of bridges on our state system -- more than 10,000.
- A And we are first in the nation when it comes to major river bridges. In fact, you could combine about 25 other states and they still wouldn't have as many as us.
- A Additionally, Missouri is 15th in the number of vehicle miles traveled with more than 68 billion per year.

We certainly face a challenge, but I know that together we can meet it. The importance of transportation to Missouri is too great not to act. If transportation allows the lifeblood of commerce to flow, then Missouri, at the center of the world's largest economy, should be the heart pumping that blood to every part of the world resulting in economic prosperity right here at home.

Fellow Missourians, our state transportation system is deficient, but your state transportation department is committed to fixing it. We are energized by an optimistic vision for the future. Your MoDOT today is a vibrant agency that cares deeply about the people we serve. We have challenged and empowered every employee to continuously improve the level of service each provides to every Missourian.

I can tell you, the most effective ideas for improving this department will come from the collaboration of our entire transportation team. I want the people closest to the problems to be the ones to solve them because they want to, not because they were told to. Every crew worker who wields a shovel, every engineer who picks up a set of plans and every clerk who works at a computer should believe they "own" their job.

Authority to make necessary changes and improvements will not be concentrated here in Jefferson City. It will be dispersed to every corner of this great state. This approach is commonly referred to as decentralization. I call it common sense.

With this empowerment will come a new kind of accountability. A new kind of credibility. A new kind of state agency.

We will be a model for what today's state government should be - efficient, streamlined, forward-thinking, results-driven and customer-oriented. I have heard many of you say that you have seen a lot of improvement in MoDOT over the past few years. To that we say, "Thank you, but you ain't seen nothin' yet."

We will be a shining star in your state government galaxy.

Now, I know what you're thinking, "this is the show-me state. You're going to have to show us." Well, we intend to. We will be a transparent organization. You will see what we do well. You will see what we don't do so well and you will see what we do to get better.

MoDOT will be an open house. Our walls will be solid, but you will be able to see everything we do. Information about how we spend your money, our goals for improving transportation and our progress toward these goals will be distributed to statewide officials, lawmakers, the media and anyone else who wants it.

Plus, this information will be made available on our Internet site for the whole worldwide web to see. By conducting business in full view of the taxpayers of this state, we will encourage all Missourians to hold us accountable and to propose transportation solutions.

Our transparent house, however, will not be fragile. It will not be built on the shifting sands of promises we can't deliver or commitments we can't keep. It will be built on the solid rock of sound business practices, wise use of taxpayer dollars and extensive public input. MoDOT's house will be strong!

And, since you don't build a house starting with the top floor, the foundation of our house will be the results we deliver and the performance measures we track, which will produce an unparalleled level of accountability.

Last year from this dais, many of you heard that a new day had dawned at MoDOT. This year I reaffirm that statement. Morning has broken. The sun is rising on our transportation horizon. And thousands of rays of sunlight in the form of MoDOT employees and our citizen-partners are illuminating the morning sky with a message of cooperation and progress.

Ladies and gentleman, can you tell that I am thrilled to be your director of transportation and to have the opportunity to address you today? I am thrilled to call myself a Missourian. I am thrilled to work with such dedicated public servants. And I am thrilled at the possibilities of our transportation future.

And, it really is an exciting time for transportation in Missouri. On November 2, 2004, four out of five voters in this state said they wanted their roads fixed and they trusted MoDOT to do it.

Since then we've worked extremely hard to identify needs and get projects under contract. Today, we're saying to Missourians that MoDOT is ready to deliver, and the improvements will be noticeable and quick.

We come to you with a shared vision of smoother, safer roads that will be built sooner. Missourians have sent a clear message that they want smoother, safer highways. Today, we send a clear message that smoother, safer highways are exactly what they will get.

Therefore, we have embarked on an ambitious initiative for our transportation future -- ambitious to the tune of more than 1.7 billion dollars in vital improvements.

360 million dollars will fund 177 projects in the Smooth Roads Initiative - the first element of our Smoother, Safer, Sooner plan. This initiative will provide 2,200 miles of better pavement for a smoother drive, as well as a brighter, more visible roadway to help on stormy nights, and safer shoulders with rumble strips, all by the end of 2007. Today, three quarters of those miles are in fair to poor condition.

The highway miles included in the Smooth Roads Initiative account for 60 percent of all traffic on the state system. These roads include interstates, major highways in the metropolitan areas and highway corridors connecting smaller towns throughout our state. 86 percent of Missouri's population lives within 10 miles of these roads.

Amendment 3 will also allow for bond financing to accelerate more than 430 million dollars in high-priority construction projects. These 55 projects, which comprise the second element of the Smoother, Safer, Sooner program, were already scheduled to begin in the next five years, but work can now begin much sooner - several years sooner, in many cases. Speeding up these projects will have an enormously positive impact on the safety and economic well being of our citizens.

Examples of major projects to be built sooner include:

- A Rehabilitation of the Route 67 Missouri River Bridge crossing in St. Louis
- A Major congestion relief work on the Triangle in Kansas City
- A Completion of Route 61 four laning in northeast Missouri
- A And completion of the four-lane Route 71 corridor south of Joplin

The third element of Amendment 3 will be determined later this spring after working with our planning partners statewide, when 1.3 billion dollars in additional bond-financed projects will be announced. These will be new projects not currently in our five-year plan. Our goal is to invest these funds in projects that will have a substantial impact on our overall transportation system.

And I want to stress--every dollar of Amendment 3 revenues will go our roads. No new buildings. No added personnel.

Our plans do not center solely on Amendment 3 funding, however.

We support efforts to allocate more money for other transportation modes such as aviation, rail, waterways and public transit. Legislation is expected to be introduced to direct the sales taxes that highway construction contractors are currently paying, and which amount to a mini-diversion, toward multi-modal services.

The multi-modal plan would allow us to improve our airports that are key to economic development throughout this state. It would increase access to Missouri's railroads and river barges. And it would allow for more public transportation options in both our large cities and small towns by building facilities and helping to match Federal dollars for capital equipment purchases.

Our plan is a total transportation plan. It is ambitious, but we are ambitious. We will confront the realities of the present and anticipate the challenges of the future. We will seek to unite based on the priorities of where we live, which is in Missouri. We will listen to all Missourians and we will seek to do what is best for all of Missouri.

MoDOT is excited about the opportunity to better serve all Missourians. I see excitement within MoDOT that I've been told has not existed for many years. We are excited to be able to do the things we like to do - fix our roads, help people and, ultimately, save lives.

We like to build roads. We like to delight our customers with smooth roadways, four-lane highways, brighter striping, better signs, wider shoulders and lots of other improvements.

Amendment 3 will help, but it will not solve all our problems. In fact, the money from Amendment 3 will only move us from 44th lowest nationally in revenue per mile to 42nd lowest. That is not a big jump. We will, however, do more with that two spot increase than you would have ever thought.

You will see the results. You will feel the results. And you will hear about the results from your constituents who will be confident that their tax dollars are going toward their intended purpose - better highways.

We, at MoDOT, also like to help people. Martin Luther King, Jr., often told the story of two travelers journeying down a dangerous road. Seeing a man needing help, the first traveler said, "What will happen to me if I stop and help the man in need?" The second traveler said, "What will happen to the man in need if I do not stop to help?"

Many MoDOT employees have decided to stop and help, going above and beyond the call of duty to help their fellow Missourians.

A When an MFA propane truck overturned on Route O in Johnson County, three of your MoDOT Good Samaritans, Jesse Dunkle, Brian Terrell and Loren Dickmeier, pulled the driver from his burning truck, called 911 and flagged traffic around the crash.

A When MoDOT employee Larry Boeschen found a dog that had been hit by a car alongside I-435 near Smithville, he took off the dog's collar, called its veterinarian and gave a family with two young children the opportunity to say "good-bye" to their beloved friend named "Rocket".

A When MoDOT Waterways Program Manager Sherrie Martin found out that the executive director of the New Madrid Port Authority had to take time off because of serious health issues, she traveled to southeast Missouri and virtually assumed her customer's job as executive director of the Port

Authority ensuring that vital projects were completed.

- A And when the President of the United States called upon the men and women of the Missouri National Guard to aid in bringing freedom to Iraq, MoDOT employees answered the call. Matt Bacon used his MoDOT training to help rebuild roads and infrastructure in the war torn country. Meanwhile, Bruce Pettus utilized his experience with St. Louis Motorist Assist and incident management to invent a rear armor guard for Humvees that is now standard on all such vehicles sent to Iraq.

Matt, Bruce and all the people I mentioned who cared enough to help are here today. I ask them to stand and receive the recognition they deserve.

MoDOT wants to “stop and help” even more along the path. Because of this, it is vital we seek new ways to save more lives. Each year we lose 1,200 mothers, fathers, sons and daughters on Missouri's roads. Something must be done. One thousand two hundred people killed on our highways is the equivalent of the entire population of communities like Mound City or Lincoln, or New Franklin, or Pasadena Hills or Puxico. Additionally, 69,000 people are injured in traffic crashes every year. That is roughly equivalent to the populations of Cass, or Cape Girardeau or Cole Counties. Something must be done.

Far too many of those who die on our highways are our young people. In 2004, 132 drivers under the age of 21 were killed on Missouri's roadways. These youths accounted for nearly 30 percent of all crashes. Their average age was 17.9 years old. Clearly. Urgently. Something must be done.

Mother's Against Drunk Driving, Triple A, SAFE KIDS St. Louis, the Missouri Association of Insurance Agents, the safety Council of the Ozarks and numerous other organizations know exactly what that something is. On their behalf, on behalf of all those killed or injured on our roadways and on behalf of too many children whose parents never come home again--we plead to you to enact a primary seat belt law this year. We haven't a moment to lose because we have already lost too many Missourians.

We have the opportunity to save at least 90 lives every year on the highways of Missouri. A law that allows law enforcement officers to simply enforce our existing seat belt law could do exactly that. I realize that many believe this is an issue of individual choice. I would suggest that is not the issue at all. State law already says that everyone must wear a seatbelt. The question now is “Will we allow our law enforcement officers to enforce the law?”

It makes sense to enact a primary safety belt law. It is the most cost effective way to save lives that Missouri has available. It won't cost a dime more in taxpayer money. However, the cost of inaction is far too high. Let's start saving those lives this year.

In his Inaugural Address, Governor Matt Blunt said, “...we will be bold. We will be willing to experiment. We will not fear failure. We will bear setbacks with resolve and press forward with determined innovation. We will attack problems with the deliberation that accompanies this great responsibility and with the energy necessary to build a better Missouri.”

MoDOT is up to Governor Blunt's challenge. We will be bold. We will be willing to experiment. We will not fear failure. We will be determined. We will attack problems and we will be energetic. We are committed to going from being a good organization to being a great organization.

We cannot, however, make our transportation system great without all of you. Elected officials, private citizens and anyone else who cares about building a better Missouri will have a seat at the transportation table. We will seek your opinions like never before because your MoDOT knows that we don't have all the answers. We also know that many of the best ideas come from the people we serve.

I was once told of an exchange between Nelson Mandela when he was President of South Africa and the international press corps at a news conference in Johannesburg. A young reporter asked Mandela how he could justify having spent 27 years in prison in support of an idea no one thought could become a reality. Mandela smiled and said his mother had told him that there were three kinds of people in the world:

AThe first left nothing behind, not even their name, when they departed

AThe second left only the bad things they had done

AAnd the third left the world a little better off.

Nelson Mandela then asked, "How could I let my mother down?"

Well, I don't think any of us want to let our mothers down!

We are committed to achieving goals that many think will never become reality, but together we can leave our part of the world...a little better off.

As famous Missourian Walt Disney said, "It's kinda fun to do the impossible."

Alone, MoDOT cannot make our transportation system great, but, together, we can.

Together, we can save lives on our highways.

Together, we can make our roadways better.

Together, we can encourage economic prosperity.

Together, we can provide greater transportation services in every part of this state.

Together, we can be great.

Thank you. May God bless America, may God bless Missouri and may God bless your travels.