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## **Progress made in Transportation System, Administrative Efficiency**

JEFFERSON CITY — One of the top issues facing the State of Missouri is the condition of our highways. Missouri has one of the largest networks of state-maintained highways in the nation, and keeping these roads up to par is an important task. Not only do quality roads help improve commerce in the Show-Me State, they also help make travelers safer.

The Missouri Department of Transportation's (MoDOT) Smoother, Safer, Sooner campaign has made significant headway in its first phase, the Smooth Roads Initiative. This first step will ultimately result in 2,200 miles of better-quality pavement and shoulders, as well as safer guard rails and lane dividers on Missouri's busiest roads. In an effort to examine the progress of road construction, MoDOT officials have begun the "Seat of Your Pants" Tour to inspect the state's busiest highways.

Over the next two months, highway engineers will examine roadways that are being upgraded by the end of the year. Officials will be looking for the same things drivers are concerned about — smoother pavement, brighter stripes and better signs. MoDOT is calling it the "Seat of Your Pants" Tour because they will judge the quality of roads the same way drivers do — by how it feels in the seat of your pants.

MoDOT engineers will inspect the roads included in the Smooth Roads Initiative — roads and highways that will be brought up to good condition using \$1.7 billion in Amendment 3 revenues approved by voters in November 2004. Three-fourths of these roadways were in fair to poor condition at the beginning of 2005, when the initiative started, and the department promised to bring them all up to good condition by the end of 2007. However, the governor challenged MoDOT to complete the work a year early, so the agency now plans to complete the projects by the end of this year.

MoDOT is living up to its promise of improving Missouri's most highly traveled roads and highways. By keeping tabs on progress, officials are hoping to ensure that they will meet the deadlines they have imposed.

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Missouri is also making headway in saving taxpayer dollars at the administrative level. Gov. Blunt recently announced that an online reporting program has saved the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations \$74,241.

The department implemented the Unemployment State Tax Automated Reporting (USTAR) system in January 2005. USTAR allows employers to file quarterly contribution and wage reports and submit payments through the Internet. The new method is faster and easier for employers to file required reports.

By utilizing technologies already available, Missouri government is continuing to improve efficiency and keep more money in the pockets of taxpayers.

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 phone at (866) 271-2844.

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