



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 431 Jefferson City, MO 65101

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Overburdened Interstate Highways Demand Reform

Recently in this column, we have looked at the history of Missouri's relatively large state highway system and efforts by the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) to make Missouri's roads smoother and safer. However, in spite of repaving efforts and other superficial changes to Missouri's highways, the problem remains that our most heavily traveled highways need to be rebuilt from their foundations. The age and traffic burden of Interstates 70 and 44 have left these highways incapable of continuing to safely serve Missouri motorists.

Since construction began on these interstate highways in 1956, Missouri has not significantly updated their infrastructure. Although we pour millions of dollars each year into repaving efforts, Missourians and other motorists essentially are driving on the same highways that were built 50 years ago. Many portions of these facilities are strained beyond capacity, with deteriorating pavement and poorly functioning interchanges compounding the problem.

I-70 is particularly overburdened. When it was constructed, the highway had a 20-year life expectancy and was built to carry 20,000 vehicles per day, 15 percent of which would be heavy trucks. It has been 50 years, and the highway now carries 40,000 vehicles each day, nearly 40 percent of which are trucks. The interstate's busiest sections, in the St. Louis and Kansas City metro areas, average more than 100,000 vehicles each day, and as many as 70,000 vehicles use I-70 in Columbia each day.

I-44 is not far behind in terms of overcapacity. The highway, which also had a 20-year life expectancy, averages between 20,000 and 70,000 vehicles per day, a similar proportion of which are trucks. These high traffic averages are unsustainable, and traffic levels continue to rise.

Traffic is expected to double by the year 2030, and truck traffic on I-70 is growing each year at twice the pace of all vehicles. This means that the entire I-70 corridor will be experiencing stop-and-go conditions.

With increases in traffic come more accidents. According to estimates, the number of accidents occurring along many stretches of the interstate will nearly double in the next 30 years if no changes are made in its design.

Missouri's high-traffic interstate highways cannot continue to function under present conditions. Solving the problem will be difficult but certainly not impossible. Addressing this issue is one of my top priorities. I have the privilege of serving as a member of the Senate Transportation Committee, and it is my intention to bring focus to this issue during the coming session.

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.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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