



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Week of Feb. 6, 2006

On The Road to Progress

JEFFERSON CITY—This week the General Assembly gathered to hear Missouri Department of Transportation Director Pete Rahn deliver the annual State of Transportation address. When voters in 2004 approved Amendment 3, more money was directed straight to Missouri’s highways and bridges. The funding, in tandem with good intentions and hard work, has enabled MoDOT to, as Rahn put it, make “progress we can feel.”

The past year has been dedicated to the Smooth Roads Initiative, a construction program to make more than 2,000 miles of the Show-Me State’s most-used highways safer, smoother and more reliable. The initiative is in allegiance with MoDOT’s priority of ensuring motorists’ safety by repaving roads, widening and adding lanes, putting rumble strips on shoulders and updating guardrails. Although the projects were originally set to be completed at the end of 2007, Rahn believes MoDOT can answer the governor’s call to finish them a year earlier.

If the current momentum continues, 2006 will be another year driven by significant progress for Missouri’s system of transportation. Several projects are on the horizon to make the roads in Southwest Missouri more safe, smooth and durable. Some of these projects to be included over the next several years include:

- Construct a four-lane Range Line bypass in Joplin
- Install guard cable in median and upgrade guardrail end sections on I-44, in Newton/Jasper counties, and from Oklahoma state line to Route 360
- Resurface pavement from Oklahoma to Range Line Road in Joplin on I-44
- Resurface I-44 lanes from 1.7 miles west of Center Creek to ½ mile east of Lawrence County line
- Make improvements to McDonald County Route 71 and Bella Vista bypass, completing Route 71 corridor from Joplin to Arkansas state line
- Make Route 65 a 4-lane corridor from Springfield to the Arkansas border
- Improve interchange of Route 65 and Interstate 44 in Springfield

I urge you to use extreme caution when driving in areas under construction so that the efforts to make the roads safer do not backfire.

Although MoDOT has been moving forward with a vision for safer, more traversable, and more enduring roads and highways, we are not home free. As Rahn stressed, it is crucial that we stay ahead of the curve in terms of the long-term vitality of Missouri's corridors. Unfortunately, down the road we will run into obstacles that we currently do not know how to handle. Although money from Amendment 3 and the renewal of federal funding has made it possible to complete necessary transportation projects, the revenue stream is expected to run dry after 2010. Also calling for our attention is the ever-worsening condition of two main arteries to Missouri's system of transportation — I-70 and I-44. They need to be rebuilt and expanded to provide Missouri with a viable and lasting way to get Missourians from place to place. Because we have no means to fund such necessary construction projects, I second Rahn's request that Missourians start thinking about how to pay for a transportation system that is more reliable and accommodating for the future.

For every dollar that Missouri puts toward state transportation, we get \$5 back. This obvious value in such a financially salient investment cannot be denied, nor forgotten. During the next few years, we will be looking for innovative ways to find new resources and stretch every dollar to ensure that this recently fueled momentum does not die out.

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*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of Newton, Jasper
and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate*