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**District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101**

**Column for Week of:**  
**December 31, 2007**

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## **By the Seat of Our Pants**

JEFFERSON CITY — Over the next five months, I will be taking the long ride from Jackson County to the State Capitol in Jefferson City, my home away from home during the legislative session. While on the road, I get to see, and literally feel, the conditions of road. As Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) Director Pete Rahn has said, people judge the conditions of Missouri's roads by the seat of their pants. I can tell you from personal experience that our highways need some help, and I think toll roads can help us get the infusion of cash we desperately need.

There are two measures I have introduced to help make some limited tolling available to the state. First, [Senate Joint Resolution 31](#) would give you, the voters, a chance to decide if you want to allow toll roads in Missouri. This constitutional amendment, if approved, would allow the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission to conduct feasibility studies, design, construct, and operate toll facilities. [Senate Bill 793](#) is the enabling legislation to make all of this happen if the constitutional amendment is approved.

With the money raised from tolls, I propose to improve and expand Interstate 70 to six lanes between St. Louis and Kansas City. At least some of the lanes could be designated for trucks only, making the overall drive between our two largest cities safer for everyone. In addition, an improved I-70 will decrease the pressure on other corridors across the state, extending the life of those roads.

Over the past few years, MoDOT has made great strides to regain the confidence and trust of Missourians. Through creative financing, the agency has been able to take a small pool of money gained from the voter approval of Amendment 3 and, through bonding, turn it into a large amount of money that has put new pavement on more than 2,000 miles of the state's most-traveled roads. We are now seeing our highways become smoother and safer, sooner. Overall, 74 percent of Missouri's highways are now in good condition, up from just 47 percent in 2004. We now rank 17<sup>th</sup> among the states in the performance of our highway system, up 11 spots in one year. Just recently, the Highways and Transportation Commission approved a bid to get more than 800 of the state's worst bridges into good shape and keep them that way for the next 25 years. MoDOT has shown good faith in doing what it can with what it has. Now, it's our turn.

In the next couple of years, MoDOT's construction funding drops off a cliff, going from \$1.23 billion in 2008 to just \$569 million in 2010. And with our interstates really showing their 50-plus years of service, we will lose much of the progress made in road conditions unless we do something quickly. I

believe tolling is part of the answer. If we don't act now, we could soon be paying a much higher cost and feeling the effects of our choices as we ride over the potholes and pockmarks... truly getting a feel for those decisions by the seat of our pants.

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](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.