



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Building (& Repairing) Bridges

JEFFERSON CITY – A few years ago our state tourism department adopted the slogan “Missouri – Where the Rivers Run” in recognition of Missouri’s numerous rivers, tributaries, streams and creeks. These waterways provide drinking water, water for our crops, and attract tourists from all over the world who enjoy canoeing, fishing or just spending time outdoors. Because these waterways crisscross every part of our state, Missouri has the seventh highest number of bridges in the country at 10,249. State inspectors have identified about 1,100 bridges throughout Missouri as being in poor or serious condition.

In an effort to improve our infrastructure and increase safety for Missouri motorists, the Missouri Department of Transportation recently launched the Safe & Sound Bridge Improvement Program to improve 802 of our state’s most worn-out bridges by 2014. This week state officials announced the completion of the 100th bridge under the program. Of the 248 bridge projects done through MODOT’s normal bidding process, 107 bridges have been completed and another nine are expected to be completed by the end of the year. The remaining 554 bridges will be repaired or replaced by a single contractor under the Design-Build phase of the Safe & Sound program. Work on 200 of these bridges is expected to begin around the state next year.

We are already seeing progress from this initiative in northeast Missouri. Of the 107 bridges completed to date, two are located in Adair County, two are in Schuyler County, and there is one each in Audrain, Knox, Lewis, Monroe, Pike, Ralls and Scotland counties. A list of all of the bridges in the program, and maps of their locations, can be found at www.modot.mo.gov/safeandsound.

The total cost of the Safe & Sound program is estimated to be \$700-million. MODOT will sell bonds to pay for the project with 24 annual payments of about \$50-million each. The transportation department plans to use about one-third of the federal bridge replacement dollars it receives each year to make those bond payments.

Most of us travel over one or more bridges every day on the way to school or work, or going to the store or driving to a field to plant or harvest crops. Bridges are a critical part of our state's transportation infrastructure, and I'm pleased the state is making headway in improving or replacing bridges that pose a threat to the traveling public. Another big benefit of the Safe & Sound program is the approximately 5,300 jobs it is directly or indirectly supporting.

I also want to remind our farmers that The Missouri Department of Transportation has issued an emergency declaration waiving some regulations to help farmers harvest their crops and haul them to grain elevators and processors. The fall harvest has been delayed by an unusually wet October. With no rain in the immediate forecast, the Missouri Department of Agriculture asked MODOT to waive certain rules to help farmers scrambling to get their crops out of the fields and into storage. The emergency declaration will allow farmers to run their loaded trucks at 10 percent above the required weight limit. The Agriculture Department also has asked that farmers receive a 60-day waiver to the hours-of-service requirements.

Farmers can download and print an emergency declaration by visiting the following website: www.modot.org/mcs. Information is also available at the Department of Agriculture website at www.mda.mo.gov.

Because of the late harvest, folks need to be on the lookout for slow-moving trucks and combines on our rural roads. The fall harvest is a busy time anyway, but with so many farmers just now getting into their fields after a wet October, the next couple of weeks will be a beehive of activity on our farms and in our rural communities. I hope everyone keeps safety in the back of their minds during this critical time.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.