



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Potholes in the Road Ahead

JEFFERSON CITY – I hope everyone who enjoys fall hunting in Missouri had a safe and successful deer season this year. Even Governor Jay Nixon got into the act, spending a couple of days hunting in northeast Missouri. Unfortunately, the governor didn't bring any venison back to the mansion but says he enjoyed spending time in the woods in Clark County.

Other hunters were more successful this year, harvesting 239,801 deer during the annual firearms deer season, which is about one thousand more deer than were taken last year. In the 18th District, Adair County hunters led the way with 2,353 deer harvested, followed by Pike County with 2,277 and Monroe County with 2,006.

In Jefferson City this week the Joint Committee on Transportation Oversight heard a presentation from MODOT Director Pete Rahn about the funding challenges facing our state. Needless to say, our state faces some serious potholes in transportation funding. Director Rahn says a "perfect storm" is taking shape for funding our highways and bridges. Since Missouri voters approved Amendment Three in 2004, which directed half of the vehicle sales taxes from general revenue to road and bridge improvements, we've gone from having the third worst pavement in the country to the ninth best. Seventy-four percent of Missouri roads are now in good condition, and more than 100 bridges have been repaired or replaced. However, spending on roads and bridges is about to fall off a cliff.

Last year MODOT spent \$1.23 billion on construction. Next year that will drop to \$569 million. On top of that, MODOT estimates it will need \$300- 500 million over the next decade to repair or replace more than 200 aging bridges, most of which are more than 30 years old. Director Rahn says his agency projects it will need more than \$37 billion over the next 20

years to maintain our state's transportation infrastructure, but the state will have just \$19 billion to invest in roads and bridges, leaving an \$18 billion gap.

We also learned during our committee meeting that Missouri is like Oklahoma when it comes to taxes. We have lower sales taxes than any of our eight neighboring states, we're tied with Oklahoma for the lowest gasoline taxes and slightly higher than OK in diesel taxes. However, there are just 12,284 miles of paved roads in Oklahoma compared to 33,685 miles of paved roads in Missouri. Clearly, MODOT will have to try to find a way to close this funding gap, and I'm sure the General Assembly will debate this important topic in the months ahead.

I had a chance to speak with Director Rahn directly during our hearing and once again reiterated my support for our county maintenance sheds. While eliminating maintenance sheds in rural areas might seem like a good idea to pencil-pushers in Jefferson City trying to save a few dollars, these sheds are critical to the folks who live in rural areas. The county workers who man the maintenance sheds are our first responders, clearing roads after bad storms or removing snow so folks can get to school or work. If you live in the country, you have to travel for just about anything you need, so these rural roads are the lifeblood of our rural communities and keeping them maintained and open is crucial. I also told Director Rahn that MODOT would have a tough time asking rural residents for more money for roads and bridges if they reduced services – like the maintenance sheds – at the same 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.