



November 21, 2003

The GA Capitol Report

Governmental Affairs 573/522-1924

MHTC, MoDOT PRESENT ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT TO LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE:

MoDOT officials and members of the MHTC presented the department's annual accountability report to the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Transportation Oversight on Nov. 19 at the state capitol. The meeting was conducted by oversight committee co-chairman Rep. Larry Crawford, R-California. The other co-chairman, Sen. Jon Dolan, R-St. Charles, participated in the meeting by phone from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba where he is stationed as a member of the Missouri Army National Guard.

MoDOT Director Henry Hungerbeeler provided an overview of the department's accomplishments during fiscal year 2003 including:

- 268 highway improvement projects finished on time and within 2 percent of the project estimates;
- 778 highway and bridge projects in the works; and
- \$50 million in capital, maintenance and operating assistance to aviation, rail waterway and transit facilities.

Hungerbeeler also noted the new funding distribution plan adopted by the MHTC in January 2003 based on objective criteria including vehicle miles traveled, lane miles, population and employment statistics instead of geography. The STIP included in this year's accountability report is the first one to use the new funding plan.

The director also said MoDOT has been implementing better methods to get public officials involved in identifying and prioritizing transportation projects.

Hungerbeeler told the committee that MoDOT is working on performance-based budgeting and has been tracking objectives and goals in order to measure the department's performance. The performance measures are grouped according to MoDOT's three strategic priorities: "Taking better care of the existing transportation system; Finishing what we started; and Building Public Trust."

An update on the re-authorization of the federal transportation funding legislation was provided by the director. Although a final bill is not expected until next year, it is likely Missouri will receive an increase in federal funding. "It won't give us the money we need to do everything we need to do. All of us as Missourians must come to terms with and address the staggering need with additional state funding," Hungerbeeler said.

The director also discussed several proposals that are part of the MHTC's and MoDOT's legislative agenda for the upcoming session, including a toll road proposal and a ban on open containers of alcohol in vehicles on state highways and right of ways.

The appropriation by the General Assembly of highway funds to other state department was also addressed by Hungerbeeler. "We realize the extremely grave nature of the state's financial crisis, but the ongoing drain of money from MoDOT to other state agencies shortchanges Missourians who expect this money to be used on their highways and damages their confidence in state government."

Dolan said he wants to address the "diversion" of transportation funds to other state agencies, although he doesn't think the issue will have much support in the General Assembly. He said gaining that support might take a number of years, but discussion should begin now. "We do know funding is an issue," he added.

Sen. Wayne Goode, D-St. Louis, also participating by phone, asked about the Blue Ribbon Panel appointed earlier this year by the MHTC to study commission and MoDOT operations and make recommendations for improvement. Goode and Dolan both asked if MoDOT was planning to implement any of the panel's suggestions.

MHTC Chairman Barry Orscheln said the commission is reviewing the report, and MoDOT staff is working on recommendations based on the report to present at the commission's next meeting in December.

Sen. Gary Nodler, R-Joplin, asked if MoDOT works with other states on highway projects that extend to the state line. MoDOT Chief Engineer Kevin Keith said MoDOT works cooperatively with all its neighboring states on roads that extend beyond the borders.

Sen. John Cauthorn said he has seen improvement in the department, and he appreciates the MHTC operating independently to keep politics from influencing the commission's decisions on transportation issues and funding. Cauthorn said he also would support tolling Interstate 70 in order to add another lane to handle the increased volume of traffic on the highway.

Crawford expressed his appreciation to all the MHTC members for attending the meeting and for appointing the Blue Ribbon Panel. He said he believes MoDOT has made some major changes in recent years and is making progress.