

Legislative Bulletin



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2013 Session Comes to a Close

The Missouri Trucking Association (MoTA) has put another successful session in the books. Each session takes on a personality of its own and much of this session was spent educating over 50 new legislators on the importance of the trucking industry. While we again spent time and lobbying effort to take care of the usual yearly issues that crop up, the big battle in 2013 was always going to be highway funding.

For several reasons this was always going to be a very challenging year: the General Assembly now has well over 100 new members with 3 years or less experience and each Transportation Committee had a new chairman. As it turned out, each committee was great to work with and very much wanted input from the trucking industry on the transportation issues of the day. MoTA was able to effectively fight back many challenges from those who wanted to place more regulation on our industry including the continued call to implement a rotating list for tow companies used by the Highway Patrol. This language was placed several places this year and each time MoTA was successful in convincing the General Assembly the status quo was actually the preferred course of action. One success that may not have been a priority at the beginning of session, but quickly became one as the year wore on, was the placing in statute that motor carriers are able to apportion their local property tax based on its Missouri mileage percentage. The Missouri State Tax Commission had ruled to this effect several years ago and almost all counties have followed that ruling. Over the last couple of years a particular county had decided it was going to disregard those rulings and tax all trailers at 100%. In response to those actions, and with the help of Rep. Dave Hinson and Sen. Brian Nieves, MoTA put this Tax Commission ruling into state statute. Now if a county does not follow it they are breaking state law. What a huge success for the trucking industry!

While there were many successes, one missed opportunity kept it from being a perfect year. As has been referenced in almost any association publication a push for increased highway funding was going to be brought before the General Assembly this year. The saving grace for this proposal was that it would authorize that a 1 cent sales tax to be put on the ballot for the citizens of Missouri to vote on. Many in the legislature understand the importance of adequate infrastructure and the fact MoDOT's funding has decreased dramatically over the last few years and will only get worse as people drive less and use more fuel efficient cars. A fragile coalition was formed to help promote this idea and spent much of the session doing so. The challenge was that a few legislators in key positions were not exactly supportive of the idea. In the end, due to increased pressure from those interested in this issue, the Speaker of the House in the last week of session finally allowed the bill to be debated and with little debate it was passed overwhelming. All that was left was one vote in the Senate which had already passed the bill 24 – 10 and the issue would be on the ballot in 2014. Unfortunately, three Senators decided that they were not even going to let the Senate vote on the bill this time around. Each Senator has the privilege of filibustering a bill (talking on the Senate floor and not allowing a vote to happen) and that is what happened to the highway funding proposal. With three days left to go a filibuster took place, the issue was placed to the side and efforts were made to try and convince these gentlemen to at least allow the issue to come to a vote. They could not be persuaded and after an effort again on the last day it was finally laid to rest unresolved.

Getting a tax issue that far along in the process is probably a moral victory, but moral victories do not solve any problems. After a brief cooling off period, leaders for the transportation community will again gather to devise a strategy forward. The good news is some of the important opponents of this measure have begun to soften, so there may be a reasonable chance that a measure similar to this one will be debated again next year. The highway funding issue is not going away and, unless we are a part of the solution, an option which is less palatable will be forced upon us. Get involved, get to know your legislators and invite them to take a tour of your facility. Many of your businesses are large employers in the community and elected officials want to know what job creators need to thrive. Make sure they understand the importance of a world class transportation system and the benefits it has to the citizens and the economy of the state.

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