

Legislative Bulletin



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P.O. Box 1247, 102 East High Street ★ Jefferson City, Missouri 65101 ★ Phone (573) 634-3388 ★ Fax (573) 634-4197 ★ www.motrucking.org
Tom Crawford, President ★ mota@motrucking.org ★ Ginger Steinmetz, Legislative Consultant

98th General Assembly

The 98th General Assembly - 1st Regular Session began January 7th with the usual pomp and circumstance with swearing in the new members and an inaugural ball. Last week more formal work began with the House and Senate assigning committees.

Senate Committees

Senate Pro Tem Dempsey made a few changes to the Senate Committees by removing Pensions from Veteran Affairs and added it as part of the General Laws Committee and added Public Safety to the Transportation Committee. There were also a few changes in committee chairs in the Senate with Senator Kehoe making the move to Chair the Commerce Committee and Senator Doug Libla taking the reins from Kehoe to Chair Transportation. Serving on the Senate Transportation Infrastructure and Public Safety Committee are Senators Libla, Chair, Schatz, Vice-Chair, Dixon, Kehoe, Munzlinger, Chappelle-Nadal and Curls. A full list of Senate committees can be found at: <http://www.senate.mo.gov/15info/com-standing.htm>



Ginger Steinmetz
Legislative Consultant

Speaker of the House Announces New Committee Structure

The House made more substantive changes implementing a new committee structure. House Speaker John Diehl named the new "standing" committees and formed 13 "select" standing committees serving as additional levels of quality control. The standing committees will funnel up their legislation to the select standing committees for review and approval to move to the House Calendar. Representative Glen Kolkmeier will chair the House Standing Committee on Transportation. This committee will refer all legislation to the House Select Committee on State and Local Government chaired by Representative Sheila Solon. A full list of House committees can be found at <http://www.house.mo.gov/CommitteeList.aspx>

With the new committee structure came new House Rules. Some rule changes worth noting: consent bills will be referred to the House Committee on Rules after being reported out of their respective standing committee, conference committees will consist of 5 members (3 Republicans and 2 Democrats), however a majority of the conferees must sign the conference report, standing committees cannot offer committee substitutes (a committee substitute is a rewrite of the original bill with any new changes incorporated into the bill) and instead must adopt amendments and pass the bill with amendments on to the select committee. The newly created select standing committees have the ability to amend the bills referred to them by the regular standing committees (this is a new variation from the way the previous Rules Committee functioned) and can offer committee substitutes before passing them on to full House for consideration.

The rule change to watch that appears to be the most dramatic is the "no committee substitute rule" for the standing committees. In years past, language could be negotiated off-line and then rolled into a committee substitute for committee consideration. Under the new rule any of the negotiated changes would need to be considered as amendments. The net effect of this change should result in more dialogue in front of the committee and should make it more difficult for sneaky language changes. House leadership hopes this change will result in fewer drafting mistakes, better policy development, fewer omnibus bills and should keep the bills focused more on their original purpose.

MODOT Unveils "Missouri's 325 System"

The Missouri Department of Transportation unveiled a new plan to address roads and bridges with dwindling financial resources. According to MODOT's press release, the plan is called "Missouri's 325 System." The proposal, calls for MoDOT to focus its limited resources on approximately 8,000 miles of Missouri's 34,000-mile state highway system. The 8,000 miles make up the state's primary roads and are the highways that connect cities across the state. The department will use its annual construction budget - which is expected to drop to \$325 million in 2017 - to keep these primary roads in the good condition they are in today with maintenance and rehabilitation work such as overlays and bridge replacements. Enhancements, though, such as interchange improvements or road widening, will not be possible.

The remaining miles of roads and bridges will make up the state's supplementary system and will receive only limited routine maintenance. That means MoDOT crews will do the best they can to maintain roads and bridges on the supplemental system with internal resources. Work will include filling potholes, patching pavement and flushing and sealing bridge decks. With only limited routine maintenance, however, these roads will deteriorate. "We need at least \$485 million to maintain roads and bridges in the condition they are today, so facing a \$325 million budget means making some tough choices," MoDOT Director Dave Nichols said. "In addition, Missouri won't be able to match federal funds in 2017, which provides a \$4 to \$1 investment. That revenue will be lost to other states.

MODOT continues to keep both the public and the Missouri General Assembly updated on the funding challenges they face. Last year the legislature passed a sales tax proposal (amendment 7) designed to supply a much needed revenue source to bolster funding. It was defeated on the August 2014 ballot by a vote margin of 41% to 59%. The Missouri transportation funding issue is a challenging one and all of the solutions involve taxpayers paying more and if there has been a consistent policy position of Missouri voters in recent years it has been that they don't have much of an appetite to pay more taxes.

Bill Proposed to Increase Speed Limits on Missouri Highways

Representative Mike Kelley has proposed a bill to increase highway speeds on specific highways such as I-70, I-44, and I-49. The bill would allow speeds to increase from 70 to 75 miles per hour. Representative Kelley believes this is "the right move for Missouri." However, MODOT spokesman, Mike Curti, commented saying the department is not in favor of an increase. Curti believes this will increase the traffic incident rate, which was already proven to increase by 45 percent when the speed limit was raised from 65 to 70 in 1996. In response to Curti, Representative Kelley highlighted the bill does not require all portions of all roads to increase, but only areas that MODOT believes are safe.