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Posted on Tue, Sep. 08, 2009 11:08 PM

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Missouri gets approval for truck-only lanes on Interstate 70

By BRAD COOPER
The Kansas City Star

Missouri has won federal approval to rebuild Interstate 70 across the state with lanes segregating cars from trucks.

The Federal Highway Administration's decision gives Missouri the authorization needed to move ahead with the \$4 billion project, which would be the first of its kind nationally, officials said. But money is a major hurdle.

"If we had funding today, we would start building I-70 with dedicated truck lanes," said Pete Rahn, director of the Missouri Department of Transportation. "That's a big if."

The project is now eligible for federal money, a possibility because Missouri plans to seek \$200 million in stimulus money to build the truck lanes on a 30-mile section of I-70 in Cooper and Saline counties.

If the state secures stimulus money, it would build the short segment to give drivers a taste of truck-only lanes while it works on lining up funding for the overall project.

The government's decision culminates 10 years of study to determine how I-70 might be improved between Kansas City and St. Louis. Built at the advent of the interstate system more than 50 years ago, I-70 has been wearing out, no longer able to meet the demand of increasing freight and passenger traffic crossing Missouri.

The new I-70 design calls for trucks in the two inside



Missouri would be breaking new ground with its truck-lane concept, federal officials say.

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lanes in each direction, separated from cars by a grass median. A concrete barrier would separate eastbound and westbound trucks. In some places, truck drivers wanting to exit would take a ramp into the general traffic lanes so they could leave the interstate. In other cases, trucks would use interchanges just for them.

Missouri would be breaking new ground with its truck-lane concept, federal officials say. Although truck-only lanes are in limited use elsewhere, nowhere in the country is there anything like the Missouri proposal, officials said. The Missouri project could potentially be part of an 800-mile corridor stretching from Kansas City to the Ohio/West Virginia border.

Although the idea would seem popular for car drivers who must cope with the big rigs on the interstate, there is a question about whether separate truck lanes are really safer.

In public comments on the project, the Sierra Club's Missouri Chapter raised a number of issues, including traffic safety. The club argued that trucks would continue to pose a safety risk because they would have to cross from their lanes into the general-purpose lanes via a ramp to leave the highway. As the trucks exit their lanes, cars would be in trucks' blind spot, the Sierra Club contends, making the highway more hazardous than the state thinks.

MoDOT disagreed with the Sierra Club's assessment. To help ensure safety, the ramps connecting the truck lanes with the car lanes would be used where trucks would make up only a small percentage of the traffic, state officials said. The ramps would not be used in areas where they couldn't be incorporated safely.

But the looming question for Missouri — and the rest of the country — is how transportation will be funded in the future. The current federal transportation program expires this year, and a new plan won't likely be considered until next year at the earliest.

Even then, there is some worry that Congress might be more inclined to increase funding for mass transit in the next transportation bill at the expense of highways.

"You've got folks up there talking about redoing the direction of transportation in this country in ways that may not be in the best interest of folks in the Midwest," said Ed DeSoignie, executive director of the Heavy Constructors Association of the Greater Kansas City Area. "You've got folks who see automobile traffic and truck traffic as villains in terms of the nation's future."

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To reach Brad Cooper, call 816-234-7724 or send e-mail to bcooper@kcstar.com.

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DHCAPLES wrote on 9/9/2009 12:39:09 PM:

We took a trip to Columbus Georgia this last week. On most of the interstates there was even much more truck traffic than we have here in missouri . The states have added one right lane to the Interstates. Some very hilly areas they added two right lanes. This seemed to work very well and it would be much cheaper than the way Missouri wants to do it.

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BIF wrote on 9/9/2009 12:00:22 PM:

Gotta love the Show Me "how to get the hell out of this" State. \$4 billion to accomodate the truck traffic on I-70? Love it.

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milwolf wrote on 9/9/2009 11:53:01 AM:

I agree with JWFERGIE,,, This is a proven and reasonably affordable alternative.. Three lanes on I- 70 with truck-only lanes would resolve the problem.. however, the trucking industry should help pay for it rather than receive a full taxpayer subsidy. Taxpayers are not receiving the benefits of the subsidies we are providing the trucking industry... it's lining the pockets of the Teamsters and the trucking companies. We have thousands of miles of abandon rail lines to rural towns which could be rebuilt and used by short haul railroads, thereby alleviating the demands on roads. I am also upset that MoDot is using my taxmoney to subsidize bike paths on major highways. If bicyclists want to use the roads as commuter routes, then they should pay road taxes and license fees with insurance requirements, just like vehicles and motorcycles.

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Seaside wrote on 9/9/2009 11:49:11 AM:

What does, "lining up the funding for the overall project," mean? Surely they aren't thinking of toll roads?!!

However, it is good to first try any public policy idea which could potentially be used nationally such as this on the limited 30-mile segment in order to observe the results BEFORE committing to building the system throughout the country. Think of the boondoggle that could be.

Too bad Obama doesn't respect such traditionally valid limited trials at the State or local level regarding his current gargantuan policy proposals which he demands be implemented immediately from inside the beltway central planning pols(D)! If he really wanted excellence, he would FIRST want to observe and verify the results BEFORE subjecting the entire country to huge boondoggles which don't work as planned! Think GM/Chrysler! -YIKES! Obama's frenzy to rush through legislation before ANYONE knows what it is or even if it will work is not something any President/Congress should attempt to do.

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jwfergie24 wrote on 9/9/2009 11:39:26 AM:

Best solution:

3 lanes: cars only in the left lane. Works in Georgia and other areas in the south.

Set the truck speed limit to 5-10 MPH lower than cars. Works in Illinois and some other areas, too.

In any case, 70 needs to be reconstructed desperately.

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techno wrote on 9/9/2009 11:38:33 AM:

As other posters said, make the trial section a toll road. If truckers support it with their tolls, go ahead and build additional sections. If not, the idea dies there. Don't use general transportation funds to support the trucking industry.

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Rjs wrote on 9/9/2009 11:29:30 AM:

So, will there be an additional TAX on transport to support their own lanes? This proposal is extremely stupid..how about teaching DA drivers?

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mdinaz wrote on 9/9/2009 11:08:50 AM:

Just rebuilding I-70, period, is a plus. It's one of the worst interstates in the nation, probably because it's one of the oldest.

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FeFanatic wrote on 9/9/2009 11:02:17 AM:

Money?? No problem, just remind Obama that Eastern Jackson county, Columbia, and western St Louis voted heavily for him. I'm sure he can find a bone or two in the Social fund.

For those of you who think the railroads can handle the long distance load. You will be the first to whine when additional railroad spurs will need to be constructed to handle the load, whine when you have to wait for the long trains at a railroad crossing. Whine about the additional noise, in fact, you probably whine about everything now. For a centralized hub to get products to the rr depot there will be additional trucks on city streets tearing them up and making

more noise which will create more noise (read whine) so that won't solve any problems.
 Most truck accidents are caused by idiots in cars cutting them off or pulling some stupid stunt that causes the accident.
 Without trucks you won't be able to go to Wal Mart and buy your cheap Chinese junk, Price Chopper for food, or even buy gas. G'luck

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badboydoesgood wrote on 9/9/2009 10:36:22 AM:

Although I don't disagree with the idea proposed; I believe there is a much better, easier and cheaper solution. All you have to do is not allow trucks to go as fast as cars and have a separate speed limit for cars vs. trucks.

Illinois on highway 55 the maximum speed for trucks is 60 mph and cars 70 mph. It works great, because the cars are passing the trucks, whereas in Missouri the trucks are passing the cars on I70. The only cost would be for changing the speed limit signs and enforcement. I believe the cost of the signs would be paid for by truckers getting ticketed for going too fast.

You could also mandate that trucks are not allowed to pass other trucks and must stay in the right hand lane. There again the cost would be covered by enforcement.

I believe if they try my ideas and what Illinois already enforces the roads would be much safer at almost no cost!!!!!!!

At least it is worth trying first before spending all the money for new ramps and lanes!!!!

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