

State Representative

Don Hineman

Don's Legislative Update
October 27, 2014

Is the Transportation Budget too Large?

The Kansas Department of Transportation recently conducted a series of local consult meetings to receive input from the public on what highway projects should be considered for the future. I attended the meeting in Hays on October 14 to advocate for improvements to Highway 23 from Hoxie south to Grainfield. Like many of the north-south highways in western Kansas, Highway 23 carries an ever-increasing amount of truck traffic. These highways also typically have very narrow shoulders and steep ditches. The problem has been addressed in recent years on other portions of K23 through a process of "practical improvement" whereby the roadbed is cut down to a lower elevation and wider shoulders are added. But the section from Hoxie to Grainfield has not been addressed. The practical improvement approach will not work here, because this section of highway is quite hilly. A full-blown upgrade will be required, including acquiring more right-of-way and adding adequate shoulders to the existing roadbed.



There is urgency to this project as the road conditions and increased truck traffic have made this a very dangerous section of highway. There have been multiple fatality crashes on this road in recent years. I was pleased that a number of other area residents showed up in Hays to push for



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Useful Phone Numbers

Department On Aging
800-432-3535

Child/Adult Abuse Hotline
800-922-5330

Child & Family Services
888-369-4777

Consumer Protection
800-423-2310

Crime Tip Hotline
800-252-8477

Crime Victim Assistance
800-828-9745

Gov- Brownback
800-748-4408

improvements on this road, and I am certain that we got the attention of the officials at KDOT. But here's the thing: The current ten-year highway plan known as T-Works is fully developed and no new projects can be added. The current round of local consult meetings was to help develop priorities for the future "should additional money become available". The best we can hope for is that the K23 project gets placed on the list of projects that qualify for preliminary engineering studies. The very earliest that actual construction might take place would be in 2019 or 2020.

In my opinion that is unacceptable. This project is not an isolated situation, and a recent report reveals that rural Kansas highways are significantly less safe than urban Kansas highways. The national transportation research group reports that Kansas rural roads and bridges have high rates of deficiencies and traffic fatalities. The group also found that traffic crashes and fatalities on rural roads in Kansas occur at a significantly high rate than on other Kansas roads. In 2012, non-interstate rural roads in the state had a higher traffic fatality rate than all other roads in Kansas.

In the past five years the Kansas legislature has transferred \$611 million in KDOT funds out of KDOT and into the state general fund for other purposes. And this is not a new phenomenon. In the last twenty years nearly \$2 billion has been raided from the "Bank of KDOT". The Kansas Policy Institute, a conservative "think tank" with ties to the Koch Brothers of Wichita, recently released a suggested five-year budget for the state of Kansas. They propose making the transfers of money from KDOT to the state general fund official and permanent by reducing the amount of sales tax money that goes to KDOT. They assert that the funds that have been transferred in the past are just surplus and can be put to better use elsewhere in the state budget.

Surplus? Really? Those transferred funds don't feel like surplus to western Kansans who have to face more dangerous driving conditions than their urban counterparts. They don't feel like surplus to farmers and agribusiness of western Kansas who must use those roads to move their products to market. And they certainly don't feel like surplus funds to the family members of those who have lost their lives on unsafe rural highways.

If those funds were truly surplus, then why did bonded indebtedness of KDOT increase \$400 million from fiscal year 2011 to fiscal year 2013... the same time period when hundreds of millions were being stolen from KDOT for other budget priorities? Paying for current projects has been pushed off on future taxpayers while rural Kansans are forced to travel on unsafe roads. Such a policy is not conservative and it is not responsible.

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Charitable Raffles Constitutional Amendment

This election season is marked by some very high profile and controversial races. And in all of that commotion that has created, one important issue has, until now, been almost entirely overlooked.

The Kansas constitution outlaws all forms of gambling. Over the years three exemptions have been instituted by adopting constitutional amendments. The first allowed exemptions for bingo (Section 3a in 1974). Parimutuel wagering was added in 1986 (Section 3b). Section 3c was also added in 1986, authorizing a state-owned and operated lottery. Currently those are the only forms of gambling that are legal in Kansas (the three state-owned casinos technically fall under the lottery exemption).

**Highway Road Conditions
511 (in Kansas)**

**Housing Hotline
800-752-4422**

**KanCare Assistance
866-305-5147**

**Kansas Lottery
800-544-9467**

**Legislative Hotline
800-432-3924**

**Mental Health Services
888-582-3759**

**School Safety Hotline
877-626-8203**

**Social Security
800-772-1213**

**Taxpayer Assistance
785-368-8222**

**Tax Refund Status
800-894-0318**

**Unclaimed Property
800-432-0386**

**Unemployment Insurance
800-292-6333**

**Vital Statistics
785-296-1400**

**Voter Registration
800-262-8683**

**Welfare Fraud Hotline
800-432-3913**

**Worker's Comp
800-332-0353**

The problem is that historically many church, school and charitable organizations use raffles or cake walks as a fund raising tool. These activities are unconstitutional, although many folks, including local law enforcement, have typically looked the other way as the organizations conducted the raffles. That is not a healthy solution to the problem, and Senator Ralph Ostmeyer took the lead in developing a constitutional amendment to legalize such charitable raffles. I supported his efforts and worked with him to insure that we had an amendment that protects and preserves charitable raffles without opening the door to even broader gambling opportunities. I recommend a yes vote on this amendment. http://www.hutchnews.com/news/local_state_news/kansans-to-vote-on-charitable-raffles/article_9862050e-5632-55e4-b3e6-65f80320626d.html

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Cowboy Logic

A bad attitude is like a flat tire. You can't go very far until you change it.

Quote of the week

The older we get, the fewer things seem worth waiting in line for.

Sermon in a sentence

Argue for your limitations and sure enough, they're yours.

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Newsletter Paid for by Hineman For Kansas - Derek Martin, Treasurer