



AGC of Missouri, MoDOT Celebrate 65 Years of Interstates, Policy Org Releases Transport Report

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By KERRY SMITH, EDITOR, ST. LOUIS CONSTRUCTION NEWS AND REVIEW MAGAZINE

The Associated General Contractors of Missouri, Missouri Dept. of Transportation and elected officials from St. Charles city and county celebrated the 65th anniversary of the genesis of America's interstate highway system on Aug. 13.

Missouri was the first state to break ground on what would become a nationwide network of 46,876 paved miles of interstate routes, of which nearly 1,400 miles are in Missouri. During President Dwight D. Eisenhower's term, the federal government let contracts to begin building. The stretch of Interstate 70 where last week's celebration took place represents the first spot in the U.S. where shovels hit dirt to begin constructing the interstate system.

"Right here, the first shovel of dirt turned on the greatest

economic engine in the U.S., our interstate system," said Len Toenjes, president of the AGC of Missouri. Tom Blair, MoDOT St. Louis District engineer, said the agency is ready to move forward on several Tier I projects awaiting funding through the proposed \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure deal approved by the U.S. Senate on Aug. 10 and awaiting action in the House. The bill devotes \$550 million in new spending for roads and bridges, broadband internet, public transit and electric utilities.

The prioritized (currently unfunded) projects are: I-70 at I-64, I-70 at St. Louis Lambert International Airport, a segment of I-270 that is only two lanes in both directions and I-55 in Jefferson County.

"MoDOT stands ready to produce increased results as a result of this increased investment," Blair said.

Also part of the Aug. 13 interstate anniversary celebration was Carolyn Bonifas Kelly, director of communications and research for TRIP, a DC-based nonprofit national transportation research group. The organization just released recommendations for the restoration and renewal of the interstate highway system. To see the full report, go to https://tripnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/TRIP_Missouri_Interstate_Report_August_2021.pdf

"As of May 2021, the level of interstate volume is 3 percent above 2019 levels," said Kelly. "Missouri has the 9th highest volume in the nation in terms of interstate truck traffic. It's critical that the U.S. provides long-term, sustainable and adequate transportation infrastructure funding. The long-term vision that helped establish our interstate highway system 65 years ago is needed again today."

