

MoDOT repairs yield quality roads locally

MoDOT brings local highways up to par with help of fuel tax

BY CHRIS REID
for the Index

Renovation of Missouri's major roadways is paying off through improvements in road quality.

Construction on the state's major roadways, which include the interstates and heavily traveled U.S. Highways 63 and 36, has yielded a leap in the percentage of roads in good condition to 78 percent from 46 percent in 2004, according to new information released by the Missouri Department of Transportation. Roadways are classified as either "good" or "not good" condition by MoDOT engineers.

Jeff Briggs, MoDOT community relations manager, explained what caused the 2004 drop in the percentage of state roadways that were in good condition. He said it was a matter of a lack of funding and devoting time to construction rather than maintenance.

"For a number of years we focused on the construction of new roads," Briggs said. "We built a lot of new four-lane highways and added lanes to existing roadways. The problem was, we did it at the expense of all the maintenance we needed to do on our existing roads, and we deteriorated quite a bit."

The main source of funding for MoDOT's improvements was the state's fuel tax, which was inadequate in 2004 to maintain the state's roadways. Missouri has the nation's seventh largest state highway system with more than 32,000 miles of state highway. The state's fuel tax in 2004 was 17

cents per gallon, one of the lowest in the country, Briggs said.

"When you've got that combination and that goes on for a number of years, we simply didn't have the funding to build new roads and maintain the existing system," he said.

MoDOT was able to acquire the funding necessary to get 78 percent of the state's highways into good condition from Constitutional Amendment 3, passed by voters in November 2004, which required all revenue from the fuel tax, vehicle taxes and fees paid by highway users to be used for the construction and maintenance of the state's highway system — except for collection costs and highway patrol law enforcement costs.

Despite the improvements in the quality of the state's highway system, challenges remain, especially when it comes to improving the conditions of the roads in the state's north central region that students drive to get to Kirksville.

Although roads in the north central region, which include Highways 63 and 36, did see an increase from 46.8 percent in good condition in 2004 to 62 percent in good condition during the past three years, the region still has the lowest percentage of roads in good condition in the state. About 75 to 90 percent of the roads in other regions were in good condition.

Tammy Wallace, community relations manager for MoDOT's north central office, said the difference was because of the systematic approach to improving the roadways.

"We started with the Smooth Roads Initiative, which involved picking 2,200 miles of heavily traveled roadways across the state to improve and get up to good condition," Wallace said. "We didn't have



Mayank Dhungana/Index

Missouri's percentage of good-condition roads has leaped from 46 percent in 2004 to 78 percent this year, in part because of its work to roads like U.S. Highway 63. As part of a new program called Better Roads, Brighter Future, MoDOT resurfaced Highway 36 and will continue work on Highway 63, hoping to raise the percentage of good-condition roads to 85 percent by 2011.

very many of those projects within our district because a lot of them were in urban areas because we were trying to get the highest traffic volume taken care of first."

The next phase of the project, Better Roads, Brighter Future, will see projects started in the more rural areas of the state, including the north central region.

"We have a lot of work we're doing, which started last year with the resurfacing of Highway 36," Wallace said. "We'll be doing a lot on Highway 63 in Adair, Macon and Randolph counties and some work on Highway 65 as well."

Truman graduate student and Kansas City-area native Sean Stapley said that getting from his home to Truman by traveling on Highways 36 and 63 has become much more enjoyable than it was his freshman year.

"During the construction everything slowed down to about 50 [mph] for half the way here, which made it a terrible drive, but as of this last year everything has been awesome," Stapley said. "Driving northbound on 63 is rough, and the road does need to be resurfaced because they just reused the old existing highway when it went four-lane."

Briggs said MoDOT predicts that by the end of the Better Roads, Brighter Future program in 2011, the statewide percentage of roads in good condition will be 85 percent.

MoDOT has enough funds remaining from Amendment 3 to accomplish this task, but any further projects for road construction and maintenance are up in the air until they can find a source for more funding, Briggs said.

"We'll have to go into maintenance-only mode after the latest wave of construction is finished," Briggs said. "To complete more new construction will

require money to come from legislation to increase the fuel tax, set up toll roads, an increase in sales tax or any combination of those."

Currently, legislators have not been able to produce any solid plan for providing more funding for further road construction, but Briggs said he is optimistic about the future.

"Right now it's mostly talk and nothing's ready to come to a vote real soon, but we're glad that a lot of legislators are showing interest and seeing the need," Briggs said. "We would be glad to put to use any resources that come our way."

Students receive old house for recreating crime scenes

Justice Systems buys, cleans house built in the early 1900s

BY SARAH SCOTT
for the Index

Justice systems students will have their own house to use to solve a crime for the rest of the semester.

Justice systems professor Marjorie Burick-Hughes will be using the house located northwest of Barnett Hall for her scientific investigation class to solve a simulated crime.

"The students got the opportunity to get some hands-on work, [they] basically have gone from inside the classroom and what they've learned, now, to an actual simulated crime scene so that they can experience kind of the stress, the pressure of what it's like," Burick-Hughes said.

"I just found out that it was vacated and asked [Depart-

ment Chair] Professor [Marty] Jayne if I could use it," Burick-Hughes said. "He came back with the keys and said, 'Yeah, it would be alright.'"

Burick-Hughes said the class only will use the house for this semester and that this is not the first time one of her classes has gotten to evaluate a simulated crime scene.

"Last semester, on Halloween night, we used an abandoned house that the police department actually uses for their police officers for training," Burick-Hughes said. "And then we simulated a crime scene there."

Burick-Hughes said the experience offers students much more than her lectures alone would.

"It gave them good experience as to what looked out of place, ... what looked like it had been left there for a while, such as with cobwebs or something that was extensively dirty or folded in such a way that you know that it had been

there for a while," Burick-Hughes said.

Burick-Hughes said many jobs in law enforcement will have to deal with crime scenes at least occasionally. She said that even if a student decides not to become a detective, he or she might have to gather evidence at a crime scene if a detective is not available.

"It's good for them," Burick-Hughes said. "They learn how to approach the scene, how to render it safe, how to go ahead and ... observe it, how to take photographs. At least now, when they go to the crime scene now they have to think, 'What do I have here, what do we need to do, what's the process?'"

Nick Zotos, junior justice systems major, said the crime scene was fun but didn't especially help with the class.

"There's no way you can ever totally re-create a crime scene, to be realistic," Zotos said.

If there is a permanent place, it will be the same crime

scene location every time, he said.

"Mixing it up and changing to different locations would benefit the students because it's not always going to be in a house, it's not always going to be in a store," Zotos said.

At the Big Event on April 5, several Truman students and one professor cleaned out the house for the justice systems program to use.

Burick-Hughes said the house was in very poor condition, but it will be ready for her class to use much sooner than planned because of the help of students from the Big Event.

"I brought face masks for all of them," Burick-Hughes

said. "I made everybody wear them. I made everybody wear gloves. Nobody was allowed to

touch anything with their hands. It was all done with a shovel and a broom and a rake."

Senior Emily Barden is one of the students who helped clean the house at the Big Event. She said the house was in terrible shape, and there were signs that people had broken in.

"You could tell that [someone] had ... been in there because there were empty bottles of alcohol on the kitchen floor," Barden said.

She also said it was very dirty and that raccoons had been in the house.

"There was raccoon poop everywhere," Barden said. "We had to shovel it off the steps."

She said some of the items lying around the house were very odd, like baskets and glasses.

"It's such a neat house," Barden said. "I really wish they would do something with it. It's such a shame."

Jayne, chair of the justice systems department, said George Grim built the house in the early 1900s.

Jayne said Dr. Milton English, who practiced in Kirksville, most recently owned the house. Jayne said that after English's wife died, their children sold the house to the University.

Jayne said there are plans to tear down the house this summer so a parking lot can be put in.

"The nice thing about the old house is you can do things like splash fake blood around, and you don't have to worry about being able to clean it up later," Jayne said.

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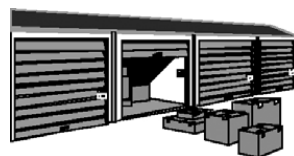
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