

New Transportation Plan will create 175,000 new jobs

The success of the 2010 session- and the long-term economic stability of Kansas- depended on the passage of a new comprehensive transportation plan, Senate Substitute for HB 2650. I am exceptionally proud that a new plan passed with significant bipartisan support.

What really sold me on this plan has nothing to do with any debate we had on the House floor. It has to do with a class I took. In 1996, I was in the legislature. I wanted to educate myself on economic issues, so I enrolled in an Economics class at Johnson County Community College. I was surprised to find the second day of class we were reviewing Chapter 1 of a national textbook. The book stated if one wishes to see a highly successful economics model, they should look at the state of Kansas. In 1998, when the nation was struggling, Kansas had the foresight to invest in a comprehensive transportation plan. For every one dollar invested in that program, it was proven there was a return on investment of seven dollars. I was proud to see our state was being touted as the state to watch in this effort. Although it has been 14 years ago, I vividly recall the discussion we had in that class and the praise Kansas received in that textbook. No one needed to sell me on the program this year. We have proven from previous state transportation programs the jobs that will be created will help Kansas more quickly emerge from this financial slump.

The Transportation Works for Kansas Program (T-WORKS) provides the framework for a new state infrastructure. It is multi-faceted, with a focus on preservation, expansion, economic development, modernization (such as widening lanes or shoulders and upgrading interchanges), assistance to cities and counties, and a multi-modal economic development program, among others.

T-WORKS is the third, 10-year transportation program enacted by the Kansas Legislature. The Comprehensive Transportation Plan, under the leadership of Governor Bill Graves, expired in 2009. It was preceded by Governor Mike Hayden's Comprehensive Highway Plan, which was initiated in 1989. Both of these programs were enacted during economic downturns and each resulted in over 100,000 new jobs for Kansas workers.

The program calls for spending \$4.6 billion on preservation projects, covering every mile of the highway system. In addition, \$100 million is to go to public transit, \$46 million to

aviation, \$40 million to rail, \$1.6 billion to special county highway fund programs, and \$1.8 billion to expansion and modernization projects.

"This is one of the most important jobs bills that has passed in the history of this state," Governor Parkinson said. "This bill isn't only about the miles of road, rail or runway — it's about putting Kansans back to work," he said.

State officials believe Kansas' commitment to prior transportation programs is the reason Reader's Digest recently ranked Kansas' 10,000-mile highway system as the nation's best. However, without the commitment to continue the efforts with a subsequent program, we would quickly lose that standing. With the winters we have in Kansas, within a year our roads can develop potholes and other poor conditions.

T-WORKS will provide about \$8.2 billion in construction and modal spending over the next 10 years. By comparison, it would take \$11 billion to replicate the previous plan. T-WORKS is smaller and appropriate for our fiscally struggling times. It allows proper maintenance of our highways, includes much needed safety improvements, and funds transportation projects in economically strategic ways. Most importantly, T-WORKS will create or sustain an estimated 60,000 construction jobs and 175,000 total jobs (including local suppliers, construction, etc).

More than 1,000 Kansans participated in the development of this new program, and it could not have been enacted at a more appropriate time. Kansas maintains more than 130,000 miles of local roads, 10,000 miles of highways, and 20,500 bridges. T-WORKS will help Kansas emerge from the economic recession as quickly as possible.

About \$1.7 billion will be used for high-profile projects such as new interchanges or bypasses designed to boost economic development.

The program will be funded by a temporary, 3-year, 1-cent sales tax increase that lawmakers approved this year. Beginning in July, the state sales tax will climb to 6.3 cents on each dollar spent. In 2013, the sales tax increase is to drop to 5.7 cents with 0.4 of a cent dedicated to the state highway fund. Registration fees for heavy trucks will increase \$100 in 2013.

"Other states think that they can shrink their way to greatness," Governor Parkinson said. "We know that's not possible. The way that you get to greatness is you cut waste and you spend money where it makes sense to spend it."

The new bill calls for spending at least \$8 million in each of the state's 105 counties. During the last major transportation program, at least \$9 million was spent in each county, but the total program was bigger.

No specific projects will be announced until February, by which time a new governor will be making the decisions on what is funded.

The transportation plan will restore \$92 million in funding for projects that had previously been delayed because of budget cuts. Some \$11 million to \$12 million will be spent in Johnson and Wyandotte counties.

"And then when we're finished with the program, what we've learned over the last 20 years is that when you complete an intersection or a major road, that then creates all sorts of economic development beyond the original construction," Governor Parkinson said.