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LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS: The 2004 legislative session got under way Jan. 7 with opening addresses by Speaker of the House Catherine Hanaway and President Pro Tem Peter Kinder. Top legislative issues this year will include balancing the state's budget and creating jobs and economic growth. Both legislative leaders spoke about the importance of bipartisan cooperation, but the clashes between the Republican-controlled Senate and House and Democratic Governor Bob Holden that marked last year's session will likely continue this year.

Transportation is not expected to be a top priority this year, however several issues are expected to receive some attention, including toll roads.

New to the legislative session this year will be the State of Transportation Address to be given by the director of MoDOT. Director Henry Hungerbeeler will present the address before a joint session of the House and Senate at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 28 in the House Chamber. The speech is required by legislation passed last year by the General Assembly. The new law also requires the members of the MHTC to attend and be available to answer questions. In addition, Jan. 28 will be Transportation Day at the Capitol, and MoDOT officials from headquarters and district offices will be on hand in the third floor rotunda to meet with lawmakers to provide information about MoDOT.

MORE TOLL ROAD LEGISLATION FILED: More transportation-related legislation - including four additional toll road bills - has been filed in recent weeks. Rep. Lanie Black, R-Charleston, filed House Joint Resolution 34, which proposes a constitutional amendment to allow the MHTC to construct toll road facilities. If the measure is passed by the General Assembly, Missouri voters also would have to approve it since the proposal would change the state constitution.

Black also filed House Bill 857, which would change state law to allow the MHTC to construct, operate and maintain toll roads. Both the constitutional and statutory changes are necessary to bring toll roads to Missouri.

Sen. Delbert Scott, R-Lowry City, filed Senate Bill 958 and Senate Joint Resolution 38 to allow the MHTC to build toll road facilities. His legislation is similar to that filed by Black.

So far, a total of seven toll road bills have been filed.

Other transportation-related bills filed recently include:

- **House Bill 946**, sponsored by Rep. Larry Crawford, R-Centertown, would clarify the way leadership for the MHTC is selected.
- **House Bill 953**, sponsored by Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, would authorize the governor to appoint the chair and vice-chair of the MHTC.
- **House Bill 909**, sponsored by Paul LeVota, D-Independence, would regulate speed limits for certain motor vehicles in excess of 18,000 pounds at 10 miles per hour less than the posted maximum speed limit and prohibit any driver of a motor vehicle from driving more than nine consecutive hours within the state.

ANNUAL TRANSPORTATION CONFERENCE POSTIVE FOR MODOT: MoDOT received primarily positive attention from speakers at the Missouri Chamber of Commerce's annual Transportation Conference Jan. 8 in Jefferson City. A number of speakers expressed their support for the department and its progress in addressing Missouri's transportation needs.

Many speakers referred to "a new day at MoDOT" when describing the progress they have seen in recent years.

State transportation legislation was discussed by Rep. Larry Crawford, R-Centertown, chairman of the House Transportation Committee and Sen. Delbert Scott, R-Lowry City, vice-chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee.

Transportation issues Scott hopes to address during the 2004 session include considering the use of existing state funds for transportation such as the half of the motor vehicle sales tax that currently goes to the state's general revenue fund and the state highway funds that are appropriated to other state agencies.

He also encouraged public/private cooperation for highway improvements. Scott said the legislature cannot solve the state's transportation problems by itself.

Both Scott and Crawford support legislation that would allow the MHTC to build, operate and maintain toll roads.

Crawford discussed the transportation accountability legislation the General Assembly approved last year. He was pleased that the bill received bipartisan support from most of the legislature.

Crawford said he was looking forward to the upcoming Transportation Day at the capitol Wednesday, Jan. 28 when MoDOT Director Henry Hungerbeeler will deliver the first ever State of Transportation Address.

Hungerbeeler also spoke at the chamber's conference. He talked about the vision he has had for MoDOT since he became director in 1999 and how he has worked to make that vision a reality.

MHTC Chairman Barry Orscheln gave opening remarks at the conference.

HEARINGS SCHEDULED:

Senate:

Committee: Economic Development./Tourism/Local Government

Date: Jan. 14

Time: 3 p.m.

Location: Senate Lounge

Bills to be heard:

SB 715 – Childers – Modified the classification of counties

SB 769 – Nodler – Relates to road districts in certain counties