



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Colene McEntee, Communications Manager, 636-949-1864, cmcentee@sccmo.org

ST. CHARLES COUNTY EXECUTIVE EHLMANN AND WENTZVILLE MAYOR GUCCIONE EXPLAIN THAT WORKING TOGETHER IS KEY TO IMPROVING ROUTE 61

ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO – For many years, St. Charles County Government has been addressing safety concerns on Route 61, notes County Executive Steve Ehlmann. When the County Council approved a subdivision along the route in 2006, it required, at the Missouri Department of Transportation's (MoDOT) request, that the developer install an acceleration and deceleration lane onto the highway. The fatal accident on Route 61 north of Wentzville is the most recent on that stretch of road.

After a similar tragedy near the intersection of Route 61 and Route P a few years ago, Ehlmann and Wentzville Mayor Nick Guccione asked MoDOT, who has the sole responsibility for the road, to look at the corridor. Under severe budgetary restraints, MoDOT did not have the funds to address the problem. Therefore, St. Charles County and Wentzville applied to MoDOT's cost-sharing committee for \$5 million towards a \$14 million funding partnership that included at-grade safety improvements from Wentzville to the Lincoln County line. The committee approved \$4,331,337 in MoDOT funds towards a \$12.5 million funding partnership to build an overpass at Routes 61 and P. Construction is slated to start in 2017. The design can be seen on MoDOT's Route 61 project webpage - http://www.modot.org/stlouis/major_projects/Route61SafetyProject.htm.

The Route 61 and P project was one of the last cost-share projects funded before the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission voted to suspend the cost-share program because of declining revenue. Ehlmann explains that MoDOT's financial crisis is the result of better gas mileage for vehicles. As our vehicles consume less gas, citizens pay less to use roads. Meanwhile, the cost of building and maintaining roads and bridges goes up, while the per-gallon user fee has not been raised since 1995. With additional funds, MoDOT could set criteria, based on traffic counts, crash rates, and median widths for safety projects. Ehlmann points out that, while there have been seven accidents resulting in fatalities on Route 61 since 2011, there have been six such accidents on Route N. Nevertheless, in 2015 a transportation funding bill died on the Missouri Senate calendar and another bill did not even make it to the Missouri House floor for debate.

"Our leaders in Jefferson City, and citizens statewide, need to recognize the importance of our transportation infrastructure, not only to economic development, but to public safety. We must work together to secure the future of both," said Ehlmann.

Ehlmann and Guccione suggest that, until funding is available for a long-term solution, things can be done in the short-term. Wentzville and St. Charles County Police Departments are stepping up traffic enforcement along Route 61. In addition, Ehlmann and Guccione suggest that MoDOT can lower the speed limit and that traffic lights can be installed at problem intersections.

Mayor Guccione explains that speeding and following too closely contributes to the safety problem on Route 61. "My hope is that this extra enforcement gives drivers pause, so that all commuters can get home to their families safely," said Guccione.

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