

Taxes May Be Key To Expanding Highway 13 At Hamilton **News**

Posted by : Randy

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Supporters of a new four-lane highway in northwest Missouri plan to push for a sales tax that could turn their dream and others into reality.



The Missouri Highway 13 Corridor Coalition met Monday to discuss an ongoing plan to convert the two-lane highway into a major four-lane route from Clinton, north to U.S. Highway 36 at Hamilton.

As with most major projects, money provides the highest hurdle.

State lawmakers discussed it but did not pass any legislation last session that would have established a 1-cent sales tax to provide revenue for the Missouri Department of Transportation to make transportation upgrades across the state.

Such funding could have provided a boon to potential Highway 13 expansion. Coalition chair Bill Bernier of Warrensburg, said the group should throw its support behind an upcoming petition drive to put the issue to voters next year.

"I think we need to find a way to be a leader in that regard instead of a bystander," Mr. Bernier said.

MoDOT's recent "On The Move" program culminated last month with the release of roughly \$70 billion in projects desired by the public, with only \$17 billion available under current funding mechanisms to complete the jobs.

State Sen. David Pearce of Warrensburg, whose district extends north to Caldwell and Livingston counties, said he voted in favor of the tax earlier this year and hoped the public would have its say on the issue at the ballot box in 2014.

"To me, I think it's a wise investment," Mr. Pearce said. "The funding for highways is just not there."

One key project along Highway 13 will not show up on the list, because it's already on MoDOT's radar. Tonya Lohman, area engineer for MoDOT, said replacement of the Log Creek bridge south of Kingston, could come as soon as fiscal year 2016.

Caldwell County Commissioner Bud Motsinger referenced that bridge and a railroad bridge over Highway 13 in Polo, as "bottlenecks" that occasionally inhibit large truck traffic. He said he hoped coalition members from outside the area took notice as they drove into town.

"If you hadn't seen it in the past, you get to see it each time you come up," Mr. Motsinger said. "And if you go north five miles you see the Log Creek bridge."

Before any work can be done in northwest Missouri, an environmental impact study must be completed on the stretch of road from Richmond, north to U.S. Highway 36.

Other phases of the project farther south are in the scoping phase, where MoDOT estimates project costs before deciding if or how to expand the road to four lanes.