

HBA Public Affairs Report By Heath Clarkston

MISSOURI DEPT. OF REVENUE ANNOUNCES CHANGES FOR CDL TESTING

This month, the Missouri Department of Revenue and Missouri State Highway Patrol announced changes will be coming in December to the testing procedure for acquiring a commercial driver license (CDL). The change is being made to modernize the testing standard to include a more streamlined pre-trip exam and more efficient basic skills course. The Highway Patrol notes that applicants preparing for a CDL test on Dec. 4th or later should use the new state CDL manual. Applicants must pass the pre-trip and basic skills using the same testing model, per federal guidelines.

Additional information and key requirements can be found at the Department of Revenue's website at [Commercial Drivers \(mo.gov\)](http://Commercial Drivers (mo.gov))

TASK FORCE MEETS ON DISTRIBUTED ENERGY AND NET METERING

The 13-member Task Force on Distributed Energy Resources and Net Metering, chaired by Rep. Bishop Davidson, R-Republic, and vice-chaired by Sen. Mike Cierpiot, R-Lee's Summit, met Oct. 19 in Jefferson City. The task force discussed the status of the Distributed Energy Resource Meta Study and the development of a report that is beneficial to move Missouri forward.

During the meeting, the pros and cons about solar energy in Missouri were voiced by various witnesses. The committee continues to focus on the topic of "net-metering" of electricity to which is a system where solar panels or other renewable energy generators are connected to a public-utility or private-utility power grid and any surplus power is transferred onto the grid, which may allow customers to offset the cost of the power drawn from the utility.

The Task Force on Distributed Energy Resources and Net Metering convened Thursday afternoon to conduct a public hearing to receive an update from the Division of Energy within the Department of Natural Resources regarding the status of the Distributed Energy Resource Meta Study, discuss the development of the task force's final report and to receive public testimony from interested stakeholders. The Division of Energy testified they researched Energy Resource Meta studies from Arkansas, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, and Michigan as these states have completed a meta study. No other surrounding states for Missouri have completed a meta study. The consensus is that Indiana has the closest regulatory framework to Missouri and found general consensus that high-roof solar adoption and EV charging stations led to initial higher costs for providers but did allow for a capture of revenue in the future. The other states studied did not all include solar in their meta studies.

Next, the committee received public testimony from the various stakeholders. Ultimately, testimony fell into two categories with solar industry stakeholders on one side and utilities and co-ops on the other. First was Artisan Solar which asked the committee to expand solar access for small businesses across the state as the larger utility companies have access to differing rate methodologies, and this can make it harder for smaller solar companies to compete. Also testifying was a private engineer who informed the committee that undertaking a full meta study in the future is futile as energy costs and usage changes vastly from year to year. He also stated subsidies for solar companies do not present a significant impact to local utilities. Solar Energy testified they too would like to see a consumer bill of rights if a regulatory consensus

cannot be found. He would also like to see friendlier collaboration between solar and utility companies. The Missouri Energy Industry Association (MOSEIA) testified they have developed a code of ethics which members are required to sign, are developing some suggested consumer protections and would like to see more collaboration with utilities. A private citizen provided testimony regarding the use of a solar system in their home and how it has helped save on utility costs for their family.

Rolla Municipal Utilities and Independence Power and Light provided testimony stating utilities are not anti-solar but would like the task force to consider developing a consumer bill of rights as many solar clients often do not see a return on their solar investment. They testified there are solar companies who do not follow up with consumers after installation of solar systems and this creates problems for consumers. They would like to see more collaboration between solar companies and current cost-saving measures that utilities offer. It was also stated solar needs stricter regulatory safeguards for consumers. The Hannibal Board of Public Works testified the subsidies provided to solar consumers' needs to be right sized as the subsidies are not as substantial for low-income families. Ozark Electric Cooperative provided testimony regarding the safety of utilities and how changes to solar applications may impact worker safety. Fulton Utilities testified they would like to find comparable regulations from other states to balance out the influx of solar systems being installed across Missouri. Tri-County Electric Cooperative and COMO Connect testified they have numerous solar accounts on their grid at present and expressed concerns over the amount of energy required from the grid when solar systems fail or do not perform at promised levels.

Finally, Chairman Bishop Davidson announced no further task force meetings will be scheduled before the end of the year and members should submit any final items they would like to see included in the report to his office.

HIGHWAYS COMMISSION RECEIVES I-70 PROJECT OUTLINE, UPDATE

The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission and the Missouri Department of Transportation held their monthly meeting on October 12 in Warrenton.

During the meeting, commissioners heard from Ed Hassinger, MoDOT Chief Engineer, and Jeff Gander, Central Project Director, discussing the 200-mile, \$2.8 billion, I-70 improvement project that will soon kick off. Hassinger said I-70 is showing its age (67 years old) and since legislation was signed this summer by Gov. Mike Parson, MoDOT has been building its leadership team for the project.

Gander, who is director for project #1, Columbia to Kingdom City, said, "We have a chance to do something monumental." The total project's funding breakdown includes: \$1.4 billion general revenue funds and another \$1.4 billion bonding by the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission with a maximum of \$136 million debt service per year paid by general revenue funds. Also, MoDOT has applied for a federal grant of about \$300 million using the \$2.8 billion as a match.

The tentative schedule of project #1, Columbia to Kingdom City, is to award the project by February of 2024 with completion in late 2027, a \$350 to \$500 million project.

An update on project #1 was presented. An industry meeting was held in Columbia on August 24. The request for proposals was released on October 6. The shortlist of qualified construction team bidders for project #1 are Emery Sapp & Sons and Capital Paving and Construction (a joint venture); and Millstone Weber.

Project #1 goals include deliver the project by the end of 2027 within the program budget of \$405 million; provide a third lane of travel, Columbia to Kingdom City; improve the I-70/US 63 and I-70/US 54 interchanges providing for better traffic flow and movement of freight; improve I-70 by modernizing the existing pavement and bridges; minimize construction impacts through communication and construction staging while maintaining safety and mobility; and provide expanded employment opportunities to a diverse workforce.

Gander said project #2 is Wentzville to Warrenton, project award in the fall of 2024 and completion in the fall of 2028, a \$400 to \$500 million project.

Project #3, Blue Springs to Odessa, project award in spring of 2025 and completion in fall of 2028, a \$200 to \$300 million project.

Project #4, Kingdom City to Warrenton, project award in fall of 2026, completion in fall of 2030, a \$650 to \$750 million project.

Project #5, Odessa to Marshall, project award in spring of 2027, completion in spring of 2030, a \$450 to \$550 million project.

Project #6, Marshall to Columbia, project award in fall of 2027, completion in fall of 2030, a \$600 to \$700 million project.

During committee reports, it was mentioned that MoDOT is holding district legislative forums in the coming months, meeting with state legislators prior to the 2024 session. Also, through early October, 744 fatalities have occurred on Missouri roadways which are 41 fewer than last year, a five percent reduction.

McKenna said only nine more bridges are remaining to be completed by year's end in the Governor's Focus On Bridges program which targeted 250 of the worst bridges in the state. He also mentioned recent improvements in asphalt pricing may provide an additional 100 miles of resurfacing in the state in the coming year. And, during the past four months, MoDOT has had a net inflow of new employees, including 100 new employees in the last month.

Eric Schroeter, Assistant Chief Engineer, discussed the latest list that's being compiled of high-priority unfunded annual transportation needs which total \$1.1 billion. They include \$125 million to improve bridge conditions, \$70 million to improve road conditions, \$115 million for MoDOT maintenance and operations, \$330 million investment in projects that increase economic growth and improve safety, \$360 million in major interstate reconstruction, \$100 million to improve multimodal transportation options. Schroeter said MoDOT makes progress using this document. The projects are divided into three tiers over the next five years and then into the future. He noted multimodal needs (trails, bike lanes, bus stops, etc.) do not have an identified funding source. Reconstructing and adding capacity to I-44, a \$4 million major interstate reconstruction, is at the top of the high-priority unfunded statewide needs, he said.

The commission's next meeting is set for November 1 in Perryville.