

Governor Sebelius' Charge to T-LINK

Transportation has driven the development of Kansas from its very first days.

While we don't know what funding options might be possible, we do know there will always be infrastructure needs. And, we also know that transportation is key to seizing economic opportunities and creating jobs to stimulate our economy.

The task force, Transportation-Leveraging Investments in Kansas (T-LINK), will develop recommendations for an approach that recognizes all forms of transportation and serves our future.

I ask that T-LINK's recommendations be shaped by the following priorities:

1. A commitment to keep our roads and bridges safe and in good repair

Kansans want safe transportation. I ask the task force to make recommendations to enhance the safety of our state and local roads and bridges.

Over the last 20 years, our state has made a major investment in our transportation system. Kansans expect their tax dollars to be spent wisely and so do I. It would be wasteful to lose our investment because we did not care for our roads and bridges. The task force should make recommendations that protect the investment Kansans have already made.

In addition to the state's infrastructure, local transportation needs must also be addressed. Kansas has one of the largest local road and bridge networks in the nation. While many of these roads and bridges are critical for getting goods and crops to market, maintaining such an extensive network is difficult particularly for those counties with declining populations. Conversely, areas that are growing have transportation demands that have proven equally difficult to meet. The task force should explore how to best meet the needs of preserving and improving local roads and bridges.

2. Forward thinking without relying on old business models

Our citizens want and need better modal options. Our project selection processes should be transparent and collaborative in order to support regional priorities. To create the greatest benefit to the state, our transportation investments need to align with our state's top economic priorities. And, moving transportation projects from concept through construction takes longer than it should. Delays are frustrating to communities and travelers and costly to our economy. The speed of project delivery during both the development and the construction stage must be increased.

Accomplishing these goals requires fresh thinking. I also ask the task force to consider how this new transportation approach recognizes growing concerns about energy independence, climate change and sustainability. The new approach should move Kansas towards a more diversified transportation portfolio that includes enhancing rail and aviation assets for the Kansas economy along with discussion on enhancing transit for Kansans.

3. A new approach that reflects today's realities but also creates a framework that prepares our state for the future

Our state is facing fiscal pressures and at the same time the cost of materials needed to build transportation projects is increasing. The task force recommendations should reflect that reality. However, transportation needs don't just go away and in order for our economy to grow we must continue to invest. The State will be best served if the task force reviews a range of transportation investment scenarios and considers approaches that could be implemented in stages if necessary.

I recognize that financing a new transportation approach will be challenging. I ask that you examine federal, state and local funding sources and consider the extent to which traditional funding sources are viable and determine if creative financing tools make sense for Kansas.

New and innovative funding frameworks that seek to maximize and leverage federal, state and local funding sources should be fully explored. Concepts that should be explored include Transportation Development Districts, Star Bond type financing structures and other models where infrastructure costs are paid through transportation user fees. These types of models will require more local support and commitment than typical bonding models currently used.

With current fuel prices at all time highs I cannot support any increase in motor fuel taxes and ask that the task force look to other approaches.

Working Collaboratively

Our state has enjoyed twenty years of success in transportation, which has been a direct result of legislators from both parties from all across the state working together. Accordingly, we will enlist the help of legislative leadership from both parties to find the appropriate legislators to serve as task force members.

The task force must create a vision that is mindful of our money, recognizes the needs of both rural and urban Kansas, and uses the strength of all transportation modes. I look forward to seeing a set of recommendations that frame a new strategic approach to our future transportation needs.