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SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE TAKES A LOOK AT MISSOURI

RAILROAD ISSUES: On Oct. 17, the Senate Transportation Committee held a meeting in St. Louis to listen to public testimony on passenger and freight railroad issues.

Brian Weiler, MoDOT Multimodal Operations Director, presented to the committee an overview of the various railroad issues currently fronting the state of Missouri. Mr. Weiler testified to the committee that Amtrak ridership over the past couple years has been steadily declining in Missouri, while ridership has been increasing in other states where they are making a public investment in the service. Supporters of Amtrak believe ridership will increase if on-time performance can be improved. MoDOT will approach the legislature during the 2008 legislative session and request a \$10 million appropriation from general revenue for investing in rail enhancements to minimize delays. Amtrak between Kansas City and St. Louis is at a crossroads and the state will have to make a decision to either invest in hopes of revitalizing the service or let the service continue to fail and state subsidy rise.

Also testifying on behalf of Amtrak and passenger rail were Ray Lang, Amtrak, and Laura Kliever, Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact.

Ray Freim, Director of Operations for Metro, reported to the committee the ridership, on-time performance and customer satisfaction history of Metro. Mr. Freim also reported that MoDOT is providing assistance to Metro to help them serve an expected larger number of customers due to the I-64 construction.

Other railroad issues discussed included the reactivation of the old Rock Island line. Currently, Ameren UE owns this line. Recommendations have been made regarding the use of the Old Rock Island line to relieve congestion of Union Pacific freight between Kansas City and St. Louis. Also, it was stated during the hearing that offers to purchase the line had been presented to Ameren to use this rail line for tourist purposes. Testifying before the committee was Bob Neff representing Ameren UE and Don Anderson of American Heritage Railways of Missouri.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION OVERSIGHT CONTINUES TO REVIEW TRANSPORTATION FUNDING OPTIONS:

Following the Senate Transportation Committee hearing on Oct. 17, the subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Transportation Oversight met to continue to discuss the pursuit of a consultant to study the impacts that various funding increases for transportation could have on taxpayers of this state. During the meeting it was discussed that the subcommittee will approach the Department of Economic Development to request that they conduct the study. A decision is expected to be presented to the full Joint Committee on Transportation Oversight on Nov. 19.