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Emerson Concerned About MoDOT Budget Plan

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*By Annabeth Miller,
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U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson is not a fan of the recent decision by the Missouri Department of Transportation to cut its budget, reduce its staff and consolidate offices.

The plan by MoDOT calls for reducing the size of the department by 1,200 employees and closing 135 facilities – including the district headquarters at Willow Springs in southern Missouri. MoDOT Director Kevin Keith made the announcement of the budget-cutting plan late last week, saying the department was facing a severe decline in funding and inability to match federal funds.

"We are facing a transportation funding crisis in Missouri," MoDOT Director Kevin Keith said. "Over the past year, we have worked hard to reduce the size of our workforce and cut costs, but it isn't enough. We must take further action to become the right size to serve our customers given the severe reduction in funding for transportation."

But Emerson says she is concerned that residents in rural southern Missouri will be shortchanged.

"I'm highly concerned about any plan to reduce the attention given to our rural state roads and highways, and I am dead set against the proposal on the table to do just that with

MoDoT. Eliminating MoDoT District 9 means other regions must absorb nearly 10,000 square miles of our state containing 3,744 road miles,” Emerson said Wednesday morning.

Emerson said that between Sikeston and Springfield, Jefferson City to the Arkansas state line would all be under the jurisdiction of one office. MoDOT’s District 9 already covers an area that is larger than nine U.S. states.

“I think it is irresponsible to look the other way on our state’s rural transportation priorities, and it is foolish to expect MoDoT to have good information about roads located some 200 miles from the nearest office,” she commented.

For the past five years, Missouri’s state highway construction program has averaged \$1.2 billion a year. MoDOT presented a new, five-year construction program last week that is only half that amount - about \$600 million a year.

“In Southern Missouri, we rely on our transportation infrastructure to travel significant distances every day to school, to work and on errands. We also require our roads and bridges to safely carry the commerce of our region, to connect tourism with our beautiful natural resources and recreational opportunities, and to provide speedy transit for law enforcement and first responders. When it comes to maintaining and improving this infrastructure, the job is never done. It is important for me and for the Missourians who use these roads every day that as many eyes as possible are on the transportation priorities of our region,” Emerson said.

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