

T-LINK MEETING DECEMBER 8-9, 2009

The governor's Transportation-Leveraging Investments in Kansas (T-LINK) task force gathered Dec. 8 and 9 and continued working on recommendations for a new strategic transportation approach.

Meeting in Topeka, task force members discussed a wide range of issues that underpin the state's transportation needs and goals. Included were infrastructure preservation, economic development, multimodal strategies, planning flexibility and how to stretch limited dollars to cover growing demands.

Many of the discussions were punctuated by concerns about what transportation proposals are feasible during the current economic downturn, when state agencies have been ordered to cut their budgets.

Everyone agreed that economic constraints pose big roadblocks and must be taken into consideration. But task force members were urged to look beyond the current crisis.

"This group was asked to take a hard look at where we are in transportation and where we need to be," Transportation Secretary Deb Miller said. "We are in a financial situation we could not have imagined six months ago. But we still need to say what we need to do as a state, even if we can't do it today."

Task force members asked KDOT staffers to provide them with more specific information about how much funding was required for the previous transportation program as compared with suggestions for future programs.

Even though recommendations are not final, task force members gave their nod to several key transportation concepts at the two day meeting. Among them:

- Economic opportunities offered by transportation projects should be analyzed in terms of job retention, job growth, growth in income and the wide-ranging impact of providing better access to supplies, labor and markets.
- KDOT should take a multimodal approach toward transportation problems and solutions. Funding for modal operations should be separate, but economic impacts should be factored into decisions involving all transportation modes.
- KDOT should implement a rolling five-year program of core projects, updated annually, to meet essential requirements for preservation, modernization and some congestion relief.
- KDOT's current preservation performance targets for pavement and bridges are appropriate.
- Local option fuel taxes are inadvisable because they could hurt future proposals for statewide transportation improvements.
- Kansas should continue to provide loans and grants to help support short-line railroads.
- The panel supports the goals of passenger rail service but can't endorse a funding level at this time.
- Kansas should create a plan that establishes state aviation project priorities.
- Kansas should increase funding for public transit.

The panel's next meeting will be scheduled for later in January, 2009.