IMPROVE I-70

I-70 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

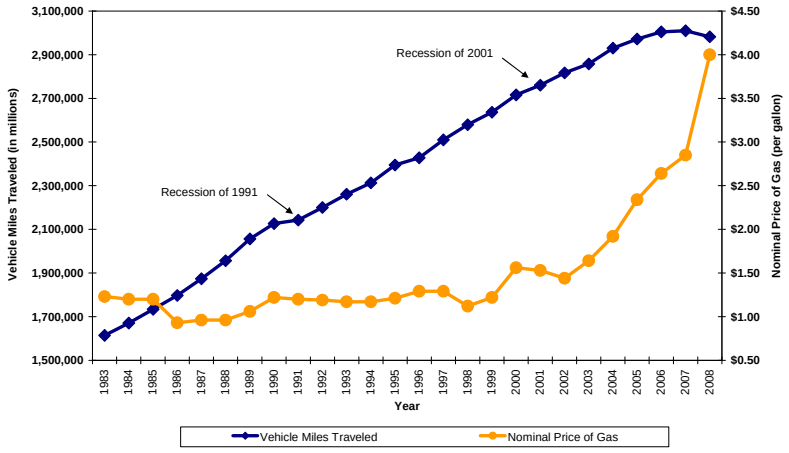
Rising fuel costs and the need for improvements to I-70

Rising fuel costs are high on everyone's list of transportation concerns. Each of us is paying more at the gas pump, and increased fuel costs make shipping and delivering goods – from a loaf of bread to livestock feed – ever more expensive. As Missouri residents and businesses search for ways to reduce travel-related costs, questions are being raised about the need for a significant investment in I-70.

If car and truck traffic decreases because of rising fuel costs, can't we avoid rebuilding I-70?

As everyone knows, gas prices have recently hit historic highs. As a result highway travel has dropped in recent months. What is unclear is whether the drop will continue or be permanent. Historically, increases in fuel costs temporarily reduce miles driven, but over time, people adapt and travel resumes and then increases. Traffic volumes on I-70 would have to drop by as much as 75 percent to eliminate congestion in some locations. Even if traffic were to drop significantly, I-70's aging foundation still would need to be rebuilt.

U.S. Average Nominal Gas Price Compared to Vehicle Miles Traveled (1983 to 2008)



Can't some traffic be shifted to railroads?

Railroads, with help from the state of Missouri, are investing heavily to increase their capacity. But much like I-70 itself, rail lines are already moving as much or more traffic than they were originally designed to carry. As a result, railroads are investing in rebuilding and expanding their existing rail lines to meet the growing demand. In any case, nearly all of the people and goods being transported by rail move to and from rail stations by car or truck. (For more information on rail systems, see "Rail's role in moving freight and people.")

Won't rising fuel prices give MoDOT more tax revenues to pay for improvements?

Fuel taxes are set at a flat rate, not as a percentage of fuel costs. As a result, the tax revenue from a gallon of gasoline costing $2 is the same as from a gallon of gasoline costing $4. If people drive less due to higher fuel costs, or elect to purchase more fuel-efficient vehicles, there will be less revenue for maintaining and building Missouri bridges and highways.

I-70 needs to be improved:

- The highway is well past its planned life of 20 years; some segments are more than 50 years old. As a result, the highway needs to be re-built from the ground up.
- There are currently far more trucks and cars on I-70 than the highway was designed to accommodate.
- Speeds and vehicles have changed greatly since the highway was designed and built in the 1950s and '60s. Travel is faster, trucks are heavier, and there are more drivers and cars than ever before.
- Highway design also has changed over the years to reflect new safety and efficiency standards. A re-built I-70 will incorporate those standards to make Missouri's "Main Street" safer and more efficient.
- Given historical trends and an assessment of future growth in Missouri, traffic on I-70 is projected to continue to increase significantly.

MoDOT continues to monitor and respond to changing transportation trends and conditions. That's one reason why MoDOT initiated a study of the impacts of constructing truck-only lanes in comparison to rebuilding I-70 with six lanes. The goal is to ensure that our future transportation investments are smart, efficient and responsive to the needs and safety of Missouri travelers.