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MAKING MISSOURI A BETTER PLACE TO WALK AND RIDE A BICYCLE

THROUGH THE ADVANCEMENT OF ADVOCACY, ACCESS, SAFETY, AND EDUCATION

RE: Route 63 Draft Environmental Impact Statement

This is the statement of the Missouri Bicycle Federation in response to the Route 63 Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

The Missouri Bicycle Federation represents its own members and a coalition of bicycle, walking, and running groups in Missouri with combined membership of over 25,000. MoBikeFed has members throughout Missouri, including in Cole, Osage, Maries, and Phelps counties.

We appreciate MoDOT's effort to make the Highway 63 project as open to public input and transparent as possible. We appreciate MoDOT's good faith in listening to and carefully considering public input.

We appreciate the effort and consideration MoDOT has put into evaluating the environment and impacts of this project for bicycle and pedestrian travel in this project as summarized on pp. 84-85 of the DEIS in the section "Bicycle and Pedestrian Concerns".

In general we support many of the comments made in this section:

- **Sidewalks and pedestrian accommodations:** We support the inclusion of sidewalks on each side of the road, crosswalks, traffic signals that include pedestrian signals and phases to make pedestrian crossing safe wherever the project has existing sidewalks and where the project passes through populated areas or areas with traffic generators.

This is of vital importance in towns and populated areas. On average, rural cities and towns have a lower rate of walking and bicycling than larger cities and towns. This has a measurable negative impact on the health and fitness of citizens living in rural towns across Missouri and is particularly notable among children living in rural areas and small towns. With the medical costs of obesity over \$1.6 billion a year and growing, this is a significant concern. Much of the reason for the lower rates of walking and bicycling throughout rural Missouri is the lack of adequate walking and bicycling facilities available for residents.

In particular, the roads that carry the most traffic through rural communities tend to have the worst accommodation for bicycling and walking. Therefore it is very important for those sections of the Route 63 project that do go through populated areas, neighborhoods, or communities, that they include absolutely top-notch bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Fortunately, because of the small percentage of mileage in the Route 63 project where these considerations come into play, full bicycle/pedestrian accommodation can be



achieved in these areas at relatively low cost in proportion to the overall project.

Please see the attached document for more details and research references about the issue of walking and bicycling in rural communities.

For these reasons, we strongly support the inclusion of sidewalks in the area of Vichy and wherever else the project moves through a populated area.

- **Moving high-traffic routes from populated areas:** As the study points out, the preferred alternative avoids populated areas almost entirely, and we completely concur with the study's conclusion that "Pedestrians and bicyclists would benefit from improved safety from the reduced vehicle movements through these communities" where the alignment will be removed from populated areas (p. 85). High traffic roads with poor bicycle and pedestrian accommodations is a leading reason for the low amount of bicycling and walking in rural communities and moving the alignments elsewhere is an excellent solution.

MoDOT needs to consider strongly helping the communities re-use the current Route 63 alignment in these areas in a way that will include top-notch bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on the former alignment as these roads are reconfigured for local use. The re-alignment presents a real opportunity for re-purposing the former Route 63 routes as bicycle-, pedestrian-, and community-friendly roads that will serve local residents well.

This type of re-configuration can also help mitigate some of the negative economic impact on local businesses that will result from moving Route 63 traffic from the commercial corridors through these towns. Re-purposing the former Route 63 as a lively destination that is inviting for walking, bicycling, and driving can help businesses on the former Route 63 survive and thrive.

- **Bicyclists and pedestrians crossing Route 63; future planning:** The study notes that "New sidewalks or upgrades are not anticipated in the communities of Westphalia, Freeburg or Vienna, since the Preferred Alternative relocates the roadway outside of these communities" (p. 85). As noted above, this is certainly a net advantage for the bicycling and walking environment in these communities. However this brings up two points:
 - Crossing major highways like Route 63 is a major difficulty for bicyclists and pedestrians. Thought should be given to how bicyclists and pedestrians will be able to use every crossing point of Route 63. Even crossing points in fairly remote places will be used occasionally by bicyclists and pedestrians and poor design can make these crossing points extremely dangerous for bicyclists and pedestrians.



Accommodation can be as simple as including shoulders on bridges, overpasses, or underpasses. In low-traffic areas these will be used by pedestrians and bicyclists alike. A bridge, underpass, or overpass without a shoulder is extremely dangerous and, in fact, nearly impassable by pedestrians or bicyclists. Addition of a paved shoulder makes bicycle and pedestrian use both possible and reasonably safe.

- Thought should be given to future expansion of these communities and how Route 63 will serve future bicyclists and pedestrians in these expanded, future communities. Many of our most difficult and dangerous intersections are those built 25 or 50 years ago on the outskirts of towns that have now expanded their populated areas far past the original boundaries. The streets, crossing points, and intersections that were originally in unpopulated areas on the outskirts of town are now in fully populated areas, and are constantly used by pedestrians and bicyclists.

Do these crossing points and intersections meet the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians now, at least in a minimal fashion? Will it be possible and economical to add sidewalks and bicycle accommodations, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations at traffic signals, etc., in the future when the need arises?

- **Bicycling on Route 63:** "Long distance bicyclists would likely find a geometrically improved Route 63, an attractive north-south route through Missouri" (p. 84). Assuming that Route 63 will include shoulders, Route 63 will indeed be an attractive Route for cyclists. It would serve not only those who may wish to bicycle from the Jefferson City to Rolla areas, but also as a connecting link for other bicycle journeys which would may include only a few miles on Route 63 that make a connection otherwise impossible to make by bicycle.

In particular, Route 63 acts as the only possible way for bicyclists to cross several otherwise impassable barriers, including the Osage River and the Maries River.

However, this will *only* be true if:

- The entire stretch Route 63, particularly including bridges, includes shoulders that are safe and usable by bicycles. Shoulders need to be continuous, without gaps, especially lengthy gaps at difficult spots like bridges, viaducts, or underpasses.
- Disruption caused by rumble strips is minimized (MoDOT's current "rumble stripe" system does a reasonable job of that, though it would be improved if periodic gaps in the rumble strips were included--for instance 40 feet of rumble strip followed by a 10-foot gap. The gap allows bicyclists to safely cross the rumble strip line when required.)



- Bicycle-safe drain grates are used throughout.
- **Bicycle Tourism potential:** One of MoBikeFed's priorities, and a priority identified in the *Missouri TrailMap for Non-motorized Transportation* is to encourage and increase the amount of bicycle tourism in Missouri. Currently about 4.5% of tourism in Missouri includes bicycling or hiking. However entire sections of the state are essentially closed to bicycle tourism because of lack of through routes that are usable by bicycles and connections. This includes the area served by Route 63 between Jefferson City and Rolla. For instance, the Jefferson City-Rolla connection was completely omitted in a draft state bicycle route map drawn up by MoDOT's Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee a few years ago--because a bicycle connection between those two cities was simply impossible. With the Route 63 installing continuous paved shoulders along the length of the project, this previously impossible connection would become possible.
- **Overcoming difficult barriers:** It is currently near to impossible to travel by bicycle through this area because none of the currently available routes for bicycling cross the Osage, Maries, or Gasconade Rivers. This can be verified by viewing the Draft Missouri Bicycle Map at:

http://modot.org/othertransportation/bike_ped/documents/District5.pdf

Reasonable bicycle routes on this map are those that are light green *or* that include shoulders. Addition of shoulders to Route 63 will create a whole network of bicycle routes and loops through this area where previously there were few or none.

This area is potentially a beautiful one for bicycle tourism, but until these safe through routes and loops for bicycling are available via the connections made by the Route 63 project, this potential will never become reality.

- **Lack of public comment on bicycling and walking:** "There have been no public comments on the need for pedestrian or bicycle facilities" (p. 85). Several responses:
 - **Citizens rely on bicycling and walking:** According to the Census Bureau, 8% of Missouri households do not own an automobile; about 30% of Missouri's population has no driver's license. This includes all children under age 16, but also about 10% of adults: many elderly citizens, handicapped and disadvantaged citizens. This is far from a majority of citizens or trips, but it is very important to remember that bicycling and walking trips for this segment of the population are absolutely essential to their health, wellbeing, and economic viability. Even if these form only 1% or 2% of overall trips, they are trips that cannot be eliminated without irreparable harm to a vulnerable population. For this reason, accommodating bicycling and walking--



even with a simple paved shoulder in rural areas--is a key concern in addressing environmental justice.

- **Reliance on bicycling & walking is higher in the Route 63 corridor than the state average:** It is tempting to believe that these car free households and individuals live in some other part of Missouri, but U.S. Census data shows that the percentage of non-car commuting and no-car households in the Route 63 corridor is in fact *higher* than the state average. For instance, Census data shows:
 - Missouri (entire state): 2.5% commute by walking or bicycling; 8.4% of households own no automobile
 - Vienna: 5.5% commute by walking; 16.3% of households own no automobiles
 - Freeburg: 11.5% commute by walking; 21.9% of households own no automobiles
 - Westphalia: 7.5% commute by walking; 11.5% of households own no automobiles

The above figures are from the 2000 census. Figures from the 1990 census are similar. Figures from nearby communities and areas of the county are similar as well.

These census figures indicate a significant proportion of the population that relies on non-motorized modes for basic transportation.

This segment of the population and its legitimate transportation needs cannot be ignored.

- **Why no public comments then?** With the above figures documenting a significant minority of the population relying on walking and bicycling, it is important to ask: Why have no public comments been received in regard to bicycle and pedestrian issues? Much of the reason is likely because those who rely most on non-motorized transportation for everyday needs are exactly those least likely to attend public meetings or otherwise provide formal comments. Many of these users may be children, the elderly, handicapped or disabled, from lower income levels, or otherwise require further and specialized outreach in order to determine their travel patterns, needs, and opinions.

This is an underserved segment of the population and its very silence indicates a greater, rather than lesser, responsibility to ensure that its



needs, including the need to travel by non-motorized means, are met under tenets of environmental justice.

- **Finding bicyclists and pedestrians to speak up:** The FHWA regulations on bicycle/pedestrian accommodation recommend working with local groups of organized bicyclists when designing facilities--like Route 63--that will be used by bicyclists. This is good advice not simply because the FHWA says so but because these organized groups of bicyclists represent actual users of the transportation system with a high interest in the subject, extensive local knowledge, and experience. These groups bring a valuable viewpoint that is otherwise unobtainable. The Missouri Bicycle Federation is always willing to work with MoDOT districts in locating bicyclists, pedestrians, and local bicycle groups in areas of the state. We have members in nearly every county in Missouri and maintain relations with organized groups of bicyclists throughout the state.
- **Organized groups of bicyclists in the Route 63 region:** We know of no organized groups of bicyclists specifically located in Ozark or Maries Counties, but there are active bicycle groups located immediately adjacent to the area in Rolla and Jefferson City. These are large active groups that draw members and participants from the wider area around these cities, including the Route 63 area. Bicycle organizations routinely (weekly) organize 30-100 mile rides in the areas immediately surrounding their home cities--meaning that the operating area of the Jefferson City and Rolla groups together completely covers the Route 63 project area.

These organized bicycling groups are routine users of the road system within the Route 63 area and they will know the current situation and needs--including (most prominently) the fact that the current Route 63 corridor is almost inaccessible for bicycling but would be used as part of a regional network if bicycleable shoulders were available on the route.

In summary, bicyclists and pedestrians look for these elements in a project like Route 63:

- Bicyclists:
 - Continuous shoulders
 - Shoulders on bridges, overpasses, underpasses
 - Bicycle safe drain grates
 - Unobtrusive and safe rumble strips that do not disrupt bicycling on shoulders or the need to merge left to make turns at intersections or avoid obstructions in the shoulder.
 - Traffic signals that detect and respond to bicycles



- Well designed bicycle lanes in populated areas (though there are few or perhaps even no such areas in the Route 63 project area)
- Need to *cross* Route 63 as well as travel along it
- Pedestrians:
 - Continuous shoulders
 - Shoulders on bridges, overpasses, underpasses in rural/less populated areas
 - Sidewalks on both sides of the road in populated areas
 - ADA compliance for sidewalks
 - Crosswalks
 - Pedestrian signals and phases at traffic signals; enough "green time" for handicapped, elderly, and children to cross safely on foot
 - Slower speed limits in more populated areas (ie, where sidewalks exist or are warranted)
 - Intersection and interchange design that minimizes crossing distances and conflicts with traffic streams. Even in and remote rural areas occasion pedestrians--usually those with no other transportation option--operate and good design improves pedestrian safety dramatically.
 - Need to *cross* Route 63 is as important as the need to travel along it.
 - Future planning: areas on the outskirts of populated areas not now needed special pedestrian accommodation may need it in the future as the population grows.

Again we much appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important project would like to offer our resources in support of any questions or concerns you may have about accommodating walking and bicycling transportation in the Route 63 corridor.