

# MTC

# Asset

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## From the MTC Director: Reauthorization and Transportation Asset Management

**E**very few years, the surface transportation industry in the United States endures a process called reauthorization.

This process involves re-drafting surface transportation policy at the federal government level and establishing new levels of funding, primarily for highways and public transportation. The old adage about being careful about watching laws and sausages being made certainly applies to transportation reauthorization.

Reauthorization will impact the nature of the federal University Transportation Centers (UTC) program that provides half the funding for the Midwest Transportation Consortium (MTC). At the time of this newsletter, there was no way to predict either the size of the funding program for

UTCs or the nature of the program under which it operates. There may be more or less money than today. The program may be more or less competitive than today. There may be regional centers such as the MTC in the future, or there might not be. Several proposals for the University Transportation Centers program exist and they vary greatly.

However, it does seem clear from the Bush administration's proposal for reauthorization and the reaction to it that three themes will likely dominate the transportation reauthorization bill when it is final. These are

- safety. The administration's proposal (although called "dead on arrival" by some on Capitol Hill) struck a popular chord among many by placing a primary emphasis on improving highway safety. Highway fatality rates, which had been declining steadily for many decades, have now hit a plateau. The proposal was dubbed "SAFETEA,"

again highlighting the goal of improving safety.

- security. The need to improve the security of our national transportation systems and infrastructure has been elevated to priority number one since 9/11. The administration's proposal and congressional proposals continue this emphasis.
- performance-based management of transportation systems. The need for better data and management systems to improve management of transportation systems is highlighted throughout the administration's reauthorization proposal.

All of these emphases are welcome from the point of view of the MTC, but the last is particularly welcome. Facilitating performance-based management is what transportation asset management systems are all about.

*by David Plazak*

### Contents

- 2 UM-St. Louis increases transportation education opportunities
- 2 Lincoln University co-ops a success
- 2 UM-St. Louis program for non-traditional students
- 2 New ITE student chapter at UM-C
- 3 Real-world problem used in UNI course
- 4 HR Green Scholars
- 4 Mid-Continent Transportation Research Symposium
- 5 National Bridge Live Load Testing and Rating Workshop
- 5 User Benefits of Winter Maintenance
- 5 Roadway Alignments as Assets
- 5 A Web-based Implementation of Winter Maintenance Decision Support System Using GIS and Remote Sensing
- 6 National Conferences on Asset Management
- 6 2003 Transportation Scholars Conference