Short line service back on track in Kansas

By Stan Whitley

Short line rail service in Kansas is back on track and Kansas farmers couldn’t be happier.

Just two years ago the future of short line rail service in Kansas was in doubt. Denver-based OmniTrax, which owned Central Kansas Railway (CKR), was planning on abandoning approximately one-third of its 906 short line miles in Kansas. Short line railroads, which are defined as having an annual gross revenue of less than $20 million, comprise approximately 2,100 miles of rail line in Kansas.

“The majority of CKR’s lines in Kansas ran from Hutchinson west to the Kansas-Colorado border paralleling K-96,” said John Rosacker, Assistant Bureau Chief of Planning. “Abandoning those lines would have been a significant blow to central and western Kansas.”

New signs highlight trails, Auto Tour Route

By Kim Stich

KDOT, the National Park Service, and the KANZA Chapter of the Oregon/California Trails Association worked together to upgrade signs marking Auto Tour Routes of three trails in northern Kansas and give motorists an opportunity to learn more about the state’s history.

KDOT had marked an Auto Tour Route in the early 90s for the Oregon Trail, but...
Psst… Pass it on

As I wrap up my summer trips to KDOT’s different districts, I’m struck again at the sheer size of this agency and the amount of work it does. I’m also struck by how difficult it can be to keep the lines of communication open. Take, for example, the Partnership Project. We’ve been working all summer to get the word out about this project that will likely set KDOT’s course for the future and profoundly change the way many of us work with others. From videos, E-mails, employee meetings, the project Web sites on both the KDOT Internet and Intranet to articles here in Translines, we’ve been looking for different ways to get the word out about this overall review of our agency. Despite all this, I’m still finding lots of our employees who don’t even know that the Partnership Project exists.

What’s more, we’re entering the part of the project where it will be more important than ever that people plug in to the process. We’ve just about finished our data gathering and now it’s time to narrow our scope. We’re looking to focus on a few key issues for improvement and we will need everyone’s help to turn these ideas into action.

So, if you were holding off because you didn’t have an idea to submit, now’s the time to get involved. I’ll even bring you up to speed. The project started by getting as much information from as many sources as possible about how KDOT does business. Through one-on-one interviews and focus groups both within KDOT and with people outside who influence transportation decisions, we found out what KDOT does best and where there’s room for improvement. We also got hundreds of ideas submitted through the “Honest Assessment” forms which could be found on the project’s Web site, in Translines and even by calling the KDOT Info Line.

So how do we use all this information to figure out how we can better serve our customers? First, we need to take a look at who it is we serve. Our mission is to provide a statewide transportation system to meet the needs of Kansas, so state residents certainly come to mind. For the Partnership Project, we’re surveying 900 residents to find out what matters to them when it comes to transportation. But these aren’t the only people who have a stake in what KDOT does. That’s why the Partnership Project is reaching

Continued on page 12
they can shape reputations

They say the buck stops with that person of unconditional authority who can say “yes or no” without checking. Since it is really hard to know where the buck stops here at KDOT, it is easy to blame someone else for problems and avoid doing what we can while we wait for someone else to fix things. When we are tempted to think we can’t influence things, we need to remember we all have opportunities each time we speak to build things up or tear them down with our words.

It is important that we see our words for what they are. Words are powerful; they shape our reputation. They are impossible to retract and very difficult to change after the fact. In this small world we each need to value our workplace enough to do our part to communicate in a positive way. Blame and gossip pull our workplace down, while words of acknowledgement, appreciation and acceptance build it up and promote an atmosphere where problems are solved.

Blame keeps us focused on the problem, so we don’t look for solutions or look at ourselves. Problems are seldom one-sided, and blame makes people feel attacked. That attack usually proceeds to blame and insult in self-defense. Criticism is always hard to take, but it is a very bitter pill to swallow when bundled with blame. The challenge lies in giving feedback to others in such a way that it can really be received rather than defended against.

It is important to be sure the information we pass along is necessary and helpful. When we talk negatively about others who are not present, we lose the trust of those who are. People understand that if we are willing to gossip about others, we will also talk about them when they are not around. As we work to build effective relationships and teams, talking negatively about KDOT or other departments damages our reputation. We need to be sure we’re part of the problem-solving process and keep our comments constructive.

We all want acknowledgement for the work we do. Appreciation and praise are the best known motivators and available at no cost. Appreciation is probably the single most important thing that each of us can do to improve the workplace. Words of appreciation, praise, and acceptance make deposits in our self-esteem bank account. As recognition raises self-esteem, it just naturally makes us more willing to give and more willing to listen.

There is no finer compliment than to listen and really hear another. True power lies in listening, because it communicates interest and respect. To get the full and willing cooperation of others to resolve conflicts constructively, we have to really hear them. We also have to choose words so people really hear us. For example, when critiquing it is proven that sentences starting with “I” are easier to accept than those starting with “you.” Blame keeps us from listening, and it keeps others from hearing us so we can work effectively together. We need to remember we are all part of a team whether we are working to raise a family or to provide a transportation system for the people of Kansas.

Communication is a strange thing. A message can travel around the world in a matter of seconds, but it can take years to travel that last inch into our brain if we have preconceived ideas standing in the way. If we have made up our minds we cannot trust our leaders or their motives, we will not hear or appreciate what they say or do. No amount of effort to improve KDOT will change our minds if we have decided things can’t improve.

We are each responsible for the genuine respect needed at KDOT today. So demonstrate your commitment and involvement in the communication process by sharing constructive ideas and listening with an open mind. Remember, your words have power, so choose them carefully.
District tours continue

Secretary Deb Miller speaks to the Cherokee County Commission in Columbus about the US-69 project south of town.

Secretary Miller talks with employees at the District Two headquarters office.

District Two Engineer Don Drickey, center, tells Chief Counsel Sally Howard and Secretary Miller about the K-4 bridge project in Lindsborg.

Secretary Miller and other District One employees check out the US-36 Marysville railroad grade separation project.

At right, Secretary Miller, Senator Chris Steineger, and District One Engineer Ray Rissky look over the I-635/I-70 project in Wyandotte County.
Survey time

Editor’s note: To keep you informed about the progress of The Partnership Project, watch for updates each month in Translines.

How well does KDOT prioritize highway improvement projects? Should KDOT do more to inform the public about the services it provides? How do you rate the safety of Kansas highways? These are just a few of the questions being posed to hundreds of Kansans in two separate surveys. The surveys are part of the Partnership Project, KDOT’s top-to-bottom review of the agency.

About 900 people took part in a statistically valid telephone survey of Kansas residents in August. Another 2,700 of KDOT’s external partners have been asked to mail back a separate survey. These partners represent the groups with whom KDOT works such as contractors, consultants, city/county officials, and state legislators.

The surveys are an important part of the Partnership Project process according to Jim McLean, Director of the Division of Public Affairs.

“Results from the two surveys will help the project get to the heart of its mission which is to make it easier for KDOT workers to do their jobs and to provide better service to our key stakeholders,” he said.

The survey questions come from data generated by a series of consultant-conducted interviews and focus groups within KDOT and with our external partners. Secretary Deb Miller said that so far the data tells her two things.

“First, KDOT is a quality organization that does a good job of fulfilling its core mission. And second, that we need to make some improvements in the way we deal with some of our external partners, particularly local governments,” she said.

After the surveys are completed, the consultant team will compile the results and combine them with other data collected during the project to come up with initial recommendations for change. This work is expected to be completed by the end of September. Then the recommendations will be reviewed by the Executive Staff, District Engineers, Bureau Chiefs and the Partnership Project Advisory Group. But don’t look for a long laundry list of changes.

“If we try to do everything,” Miller said, “We won’t end up doing anything.” So she’d like to see the consultant team come up with a few key concepts on which KDOT can focus its time and energy.

Another fertile source of ideas for change is coming from the Partnership Project’s Listening Log. More than 300 people have submitted ideas through the “Honest Assessments” input form on the KDOT Intranet and Internet sites. Some of these ideas will fit into the project’s key initiatives for change, but the ones that don’t won’t be forgotten. Additional suggestions from the log will be reviewed and prioritized. Smaller teams will then be formed to work on the top priorities. The Partnership Project team plans to post a record of the suggestions and how they are being addressed.
The summer months have been a busy time for KDOT’s District Public Involvement Liaisons who have used numerous avenues to help keep the public informed.

Public Involvement Liaisons - with the assistance of employees in their districts - had county fair booths in five of KDOT’s six districts. The public also had the opportunity to learn more about the US-54 System Enhancement project between Pratt and Kingman with informational drop-in centers at three locations and KDOT had a booth at the Buy Kansas Expo in Topeka.

Helping to better inform the public

Larry Thompson, District Six Engineer, talks to visitors at the KDOT booth at the Morton County Fair in Elkhart. District Six also had booths at the Gray County Fair in Cimarron, the Greeley County Fair in Tribune, and the Finney County Fair in Garden City.

Information on the US-54 System Enhancement project between Pratt and Kingman was made available to the public at this drop-in center at the Pratt County courthouse. Similar displays were at the Kingman County Courthouse and the Cunningham Bank.

District One employees Chuck Kincade, Equipment Operator Senior, and Troy Hickman, Equipment Operator, provide promotional materials to visitors at KDOT’s booth at the Buy Kansas First Expo in Topeka.

Hill City Subarea Equipment Operator Maford Yenglin helps a future driver at KDOT’s booth at the Graham County Fair.

A visitor to the KDOT booth at the Miami County Fair learns about the agency’s “Safe. Not Sorry” driver education and awareness program.

Dan Flemming, Equipment Operator Specialist, provides information to visitors at the Tri-Rivers Fair in Salina.
How can we move all KDOT servers running mission critical applications with minimal disruption in service? The answer, of course, is with lots of planning and careful execution. The KDOT Data Center is a collection of KDOT servers, switches, storage systems, backup systems, and other related equipment. Like the rest of the new facility, the Data Center will be a significant step-up from our current surroundings. It is currently located on the 11th floor of the Docking Building, the first and third floor of the Thacher Building, and various rooms and closets.

While actual move dates have not yet been determined, a team in the Bureau of Computer Services, along with consultant experts who have worked on numerous Data Center moves, have been meeting and making plans for several months. As schedules become more firm in the next few months you will be seeing much more detailed information, but the following is a general outline:

- The Data Center will move several weeks prior to any people moving into the new building, allowing us time to ensure that the new environment is stable. The Data Center move will be done in four stages:
  1. Harrison Center network testing.
  2. Test lab move.
  4. Remainder of the Data Center move.
- You will be asked to pack your telephone and the small parts of your desktop computer in a box; the power cords, mouse, keyboard, etc. You will be provided with tags to attach to your monitor and CPU, and everything will be moved along with the rest of your office materials. More detailed information will be provided later.
- Assistance will be provided for those who are not comfortable disassembling and reassembling their own computer.
- DISC will be installing and testing all of the telephone and network connections in each office. Your current telephone number will transfer to the Harrison Center the night before you move. When you arrive at your new office, all you should have to do is plug in your telephone and computer and they should work.
- In the event that your computer or telephone does not work, extra Help Desk personnel will be available to assist you.
- For each group that will be moving, the mission critical applications that support that group will be identified. Although the Data Center and all applications should be up and running prior to the move of any personnel, there may be instances where your personal computer does not run some applications correctly after it has physically moved. The Application Support Groups and Help Desk will be available to assist you.
- Printers are one of the more difficult areas to move. In some cases printers will have to be redefined because groups that currently share a printer may not be moving to adjacent areas of the new building. The Help Desk will be available to help everyone locate and attach to a new printer.

New Smoky Valley Scenic Byway designated

Looking for a quick getaway? Then check out the Smoky Valley Scenic Byway, the sixth scenic byway to be designated in Kansas. This route follows K-147/K-4 and US-283 in Trego and Ness counties showcasing the Smoky Hill River Valley and the Cedar Bluff Reservoir. This byway offers visitors an opportunity to experience the transition between the mixed grass prairie and the short grass prairie of the Great Plains. The area is steeped in the history of the westward movement of pioneers and gold seekers on the Smoky Hill Trail and those early settlers whose vision was to tame the grasslands as their own.

The local Smoky Valley Scenic Byway Committee, headed by Mary and Dave Hendricks of Thistle Hill Bed and Breakfast, plans to do wildflower plantings along the route in conjunction with roadway construction on US-283. They also would like to post crop identification signs so visitors will recognize the different crops grown along the byway.

The Kansas Scenic Byways Program is designed to designate routes of uniformly high

Continued on page 9
By Ron Kaufman

I awoke one morning not long ago (It’s been 42 years ago to be exact, merely a “blink” in geologic time) to discover my lucky school shirt was missing. There was a geography test that day and the shirt was an essential tool in my struggle for academic success. After a thorough search of the one and only dresser drawer where it could possibly have been, I rushed in a panic to report my missing shirt to my mother. She rolled her eyes, calmly followed me back to the bedroom I shared with my brother, and rooted around in the debris in our closet. I tried to tell her that my shirt couldn’t possibly have been in there. Suddenly, with a forceful sigh, Mother snatched the missing shirt from the gloom where it was hanging, tossed it my way, and remarked, “If it was a snake, it would have bitten you!” Mother was awesome. Not only could she rescue lost clothing, but with her keen eyes she could spot a snake as easily as a hawk.

I could have used Mother’s help as I searched for a suitable topic for this month’s Translines. When I finally found one, it was so close it could have bitten me. As a matter of fact, it is close to many KDOT employees. Right under our noses and on the tips of our tongues is the Partnership Project (P2).

Many in KDOT may recognize the similarities between P2 and public involvement in our engineering decision-making process. In the pursuit of involvement, P2 committee members have formed an advisory group, conducted internal and external interviews, conducted internal and external focus group meetings, and are conducting citizen and stakeholder surveys. A KDOT Intranet and Internet page was initiated early in the project to help keep employees and the public informed about the project and its progress. I want to encourage everyone to spend some time perusing the pages. Not only will you find some good information, you’ll see some examples of ways to keep the public informed, educated, and involved. My particular favorite is the Listening Log, a place where anyone can identify an issue they’re concerned about, discuss it, and offer thoughts on how to address it.

I want to use the Partnership Project to make a larger point. P2 allows all of us to participate in the decision-making process, something KDOT has been striving to improve on the public side. There are more than 3,000 employees in KDOT, spread all across the state and you can bet each of us has our own ideas and concerns. Public involvement isn’t about talking to every single person who may be affected and trying to accommodate his or her wishes. It isn’t about making everyone happy. It isn’t about trying to use every idea that might come from the involvement. It isn’t even about reaching consensus. With the sheer number of people involved, it would be impossible to create everyone’s ideal outcome. Public involvement is about giving people a voice, an opportunity to be heard. Public involvement is about doing our best to learn about people’s issues so that we can be responsive to them in the way we do business, if possible and practical. It is about keeping people informed and it is about educating people so that they can begin to understand why decisions are made, even if they can’t be changed.

Some KDOT employees will be affected by whatever is ahead as a result of P2. Others may scarcely notice a ripple. So, it might be hard for us to appreciate the involvement efforts that have gone into such a complicated matter. There will be people who will be unhappy with the end result, but I hope most of us can agree that the P2 committee has mounted a sound involvement effort in the face of a very challenging situation. No longer is public involvement just for the public “out there.” Now, it’s close to home, too. Luckily, I found the story before Mother did.
Scenic Byway

Continued from page 7

those signs were outdated and needed to be replaced, according to David Church, State Traffic Signing Engineer. The National Park Service asked if KDOT would upgrade the signs and also include signs for the California Trail and the Pony Express Trail in January 2003. The goal was to have new signs in place for the Oregon/California Trails Association National Convention that took place in Manhattan August 10-16.

Kerry McDonald, Sign Shop Worker Supervisor, and his crew fabricated more than 500 signs in a very short amount of time to give District personnel enough time to remove existing signs and install the new ones. “Everyone was very cooperative to work with and they did their part to make this project a success,” Church said.

The signs are located in District One and District Two with five area offices in Topeka, Kansas City, Horton, Wamego and Clay Center involved in the project. Kevin Shorzman, Area Engineer in Wamego, said they worked with the society to identify the exact locations where the trail crossed the highway to make sure the signs were placed properly.

“The signs will help guide the traveling public along the tour route,” Shorzman said. “The route signs have advanced signing and are placed so they don’t conflict with our regulatory warning signs, but they are still in a position where they provide guidance to the traveling public.”

There are three to four signs on each post and Schorzman said there were a number of sign locations throughout his area. “Our guys did an excellent job of putting up the signs to make them visible and aesthetically pleasing,” he said.

Church recently followed the Auto Tour Routes and was very impressed with the scenery and history regarding the trails. One of the many highlights was Alcove Springs in Marshall County just off of US-77.

“The spring was discovered by the immigrants that were on the trail heading west,” Church said. “It became a significant place along the trail where other travelers stopped to get water and camp. You can walk back to the spring and see names carved into the rocks of people who camped there in the 1840s. The first member of the Donner Party was buried at Alcove Springs.”

Church said you can see wagon ruts in the ground where the actual wagon trains came through on the other side of the springs in a field. There are signs marking the wagon ruts as the Oregon Trail.

For more information on the Auto Tour Routes in Kansas, go to the web site www.nps.gov/oreg/oreg/oreg.htm, go to the Auto Tour Route link, then click on Kansas.

New Auto Tour Route signs marking the Oregon Trail, California Trail, and the Pony Express help guide motorists in Kansas.
Ten current and former KDOT employees meet with Gov. Kathleen Sebelius at the State Capitol on July 8 to be honored for 40 years of state service. The employees are left, to right, Gary Merritt, Robert Schnelle, Maria Martinez, Neil Caudell, Ralph Hicks, George Sloop, Kenneth McKenzie, John Wherry, Allen Grunder, and John Cooper.

Realizing the importance of such a loss, Rosacker and John Maddox, Rail Affairs Program Manager, went to work. Searching for a company to take over the short line railroad, Rosacker found an interested party in Watco Cos., of Pittsburg. Watco bought the CKR in a deal that closed June 29, 2001. On July 1 of that year, they began operating trains on former CKR lines as the Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad (K&O).

“John Rosacker and the rail unit helped take the lead in making sure rail service was maintained in central and western Kansas,” said Ed McKechnie, Vice President of Strategic Development for Watco. “The work KDOT has done serves as a model for public/private partnerships for other states. KDOT understood we should be held accountable for providing service to our customers and this is a relationship that continues to grow.”

The Comprehensive Transportation Plan provided the jump-start to get the K&O trains running. One component of the CTP was rail assistance using state rail service improvement funds, which provided low interest loans or grants to short line railroads for rehabilitation and acquisition.

Beginning at the end of fiscal 2001 and continuing over the next six fiscal years a total of $11.5 million in state funds will be offered in grants to Watco for the short line rail acquisition.

This year’s bumper wheat harvest had plenty of grain cars rolling on the K&O. Watco used 1,650 rail cars during the recent wheat harvest with many of the cars running on the K&O lines. Included were 650 rail cars from the K&O and sister railroad South Kansas and Oklahoma, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and Union Pacific provided an additional 1,000 cars.

The use of rail is a major switch from three years ago, when 65 percent of the wheat left elevators on trucks. That’s good news for KDOT, which faces major increases in road repair costs when the wheat harvest moves by truck.

“Kansas State Professor of Economics Michael Babcock has done extensive studies on the relationship between trucks and highway damage,” said Rosacker. “He released a study this spring, estimating that the loss of short line railroads in the western two-thirds of Kansas would result in an increase of $58 million a year in highway maintenance.”

Shipper dissatisfaction on the CKR short line was a real concern several years ago, but now that’s changed with revitalization in shipping by rail in central and western Kansas.

“Public reaction to the K&O operation has been very positive,” said Maddox. “Watco has made a commitment to improve service and dependability. The shippers we’ve heard from are pleased they have this type of short line service available, especially during harvest.”
Welcome new KDOT employees!

Headquarters
Stan Black, Programming and Analyst Manager, Computer Services
James Klingerman, Engineering Technician, Materials and Research
David Marten II, Engineering Technician, Materials and Research
Toni-Valdivia-Munoz, Senior Administrative Assistant, Traffic Safety
Scott Shields, Environmental Scientist III, Design

District Two
Matthew Williamson, Engineering Associate I, Salina

District Four
Lawrence Meis, Engineering Technician Senior, Chanute

District Six
Dawn Anderson, Engineering Associate I, Syracuse

Let us know!

Have you ever tried the KDOT Web site? Then the Internet Content Committee wants to hear from you. It’s in the process of conducting an Internet quality survey to determine how to make KDOT’s Web pages more useful. You can take part in the short online survey by going to KDOT’s home page (www.ksdot.org) and clicking on the blue survey box at the bottom of the page.

Brown Bag

Lunch
Speaker: Jim Richardson, Road Design Leader
Date: Wednesday, September 3
Time: Noon to 1 p.m.
Place: 4th floor conference room, Docking State Office Building
All employees are invited to attend.

Milestones

KDOT salutes its employees celebrating anniversaries in August

10 Years
Margie Baum ............... Topeka
Wayne Heller ............. Junction City
Sharon Ross ............... Sedan
Gail Sloyer ............... Topeka

20 Years
Safwat Bishara ............ Topeka
Gerald Collins ............. Lyons
Janet Wohler ............. Wamego

30 Years
John Lillig III ............ Bonner Springs
Kenneth Richers ........... St. Francis

This information is compiled by each Office, Bureau, Division, and District.
### Promotions/Transfers

**Headquarters**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Patricia Ahlenius</td>
<td>Information Technology Consultant III, Computer Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Jo Bruner</td>
<td>Engineering Technician, Traffic Engineering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terri Comfort</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant, Topeka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee Grosch</td>
<td>Professional Civil Engineer I, Materials and Research</td>
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<td>Stephanie Malcom</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Robert Ott</td>
<td>Professional Civil Engineer I, Traffic Engineering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don Verge</td>
<td>Right of Way Agent II, Topeka</td>
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<td>Kyle Schneweis</td>
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<td>Amy Pope</td>
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**District One**

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<tr>
<td>Larry Shane</td>
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**District Four**

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**District Five**

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The Bureau of Personnel Services supplies information for promotions/transfers to Translines.

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### Miller

Continued from page 2

out to external stakeholders such as cities, counties, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, transit providers, legislators, contractors, and consultants. By asking these external stakeholders what works and what doesn’t, I’m hoping we can really get to the heart of what it will take to make this great agency even better. The resulting ideas for change will then be run past KDOT managers to make sure that they can be implemented before any final recommendations are made.

I look at the project like the building of a pyramid. We started with a foundation built from literally hundreds of ideas. Then we used research to narrow our scope. From there, we tested the remaining ideas, further narrowing our scope. By the time we’re at the top of the pyramid, we have come up with the key issues which are most important to a broad cross-section of our customers, both internally and externally.

If you haven’t already, now’s the time to get plugged in to the Partnership Project. We’ve tried to make the process as open and transparent as possible. There’s lots of information about what we’ve learned so far on the project’s Web sites. Weekly project updates are also sent out by E-mail. But because Internet access isn’t yet a reality for everyone in our agency, if you know someone who doesn’t get the E-mail, do me a favor: print it out and pass it on. With your help, we can make sure that information about this important project makes it to everyone at KDOT.