

TRANS LINES

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February 2024

STORMING KANSAS



A KDOT plow operator clears I-70 in Shawnee County during the first of several snowstorms that hit Kansas in early January. Photo by Multimedia Services

KDOT crews stand up to series of severe statewide winter storms

By Steve Hale
Director of Communications

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the I-70 KanDrive camera view at Grainfield spoke volumes. The screen showed only white.

Blizzard conditions turned visibility to zero across much of western Kansas on Jan. 8, part of a three-punch series of storm systems to hit Kansas. With I-70 closed for an extended time – as was virtually every highway west of Great Bend and elsewhere – KDOT crews across the state faced extraordinary challenges.

Along I-70, District Three snowplow operations morphed into “search-and-rescue” missions to deliver stranded motorists and truckers to safety. Left behind were crashed and abandoned vehicles strewn across the interstate as blowing snow drifted and piled.

Similar scenarios unfolded in southwest, south central and north central Kansas under brutal SNICE conditions. When meat packing plants in Dodge City and Garden City released workers into the storm at the end of a shift, vehicles leaving the plant didn’t get far before becoming stuck. Employees made their way back on foot or stayed in their vehicles overnight. Joe Finley, District Six Maintenance Engineer, said there were reports of as many as 60 abandoned vehicles clogging U.S. 400 near the Cargill facility in Dodge City.

“It looks like a parking lot,” Finley reported while clean-up was underway.

Longtime KDOT employees might recall memories of more

ferocious storms, but January’s sequence of snow and wind and bitter cold temperature across such a broad breadth of Kansas elevated recent storms to memory book status.

“I’m proud of the way our crews stepped up under such extreme weather conditions,” said Clay Adams, Field Operations Director. “It’s a credit to KDOT employees for being prepared and opening things back up as quickly as they did.”

INSIDE: Taking on SNICE! KDOT crews tackle wild winter weather in January.

Adding to the challenge, dangerous conditions at times delayed plowing. High winds continually blew snow back on roadways. Moving and removing abandoned and crashed vehicles blocking roadways was required. Back-to-back-to-back SNICE systems allowed little time to rest, as crews maintained, repaired and reloaded equipment in preparation for the next approaching storm front.

Adams said KDOT crews and seasonal drivers did a remarkably fine job considering the agency is experiencing a 25% statewide shortage in equipment operators. Adams credited good preparation and communication between drivers, supervisors and law enforcement agencies. He said news media outlets cooperated by sharing KDOT updates, urging motorists to stay in place and directing travelers to the [KanDrive website](#) and mobile app for current road conditions.



Let's talk.

Transportation Secretary Calvin Reed

Emphasizing better pay for a job well done

There are not nearly enough superlatives for how well KDOT responded to January's barrage of winter weather. I'm pleased this issue of Translines brings attention to the agency's exemplary response to clearing roadways in the face of one of the most challenging series of storms in recent memory.

I'm also glad to see front-line employees who routinely go toe to toe with the snow, wind and cold are being better compensated for their efforts. As announced in December by Deputy Secretary Greg Schieber, Snow and Ice (SNICE) premium pay increased from \$1.50 per hour to \$3 per hour through a directive issued by Governor Laura Kelly.

SNICE pay is in addition to an employee's regular rate of pay and is associated with work conditions considered more strenuous or having a higher risk level. The increase brings the agency's SNICE pay closer to industry standards and is part of our focused efforts to improve differentials such as standby pay and public accommodation pay.

Using a similarly targeted approach, in 2023 we were able to work with Governor Kelly to secure a pay plan adjustment for licensed engineering positions within the agency, where hiring and retention has become increasingly more challenging. The modification was based on examination of market rates, labor availability and other factors.

These changes are within the framework of a commitment from Governor Kelly and the Kansas Legislature to continue to make compensation for state employees more competitive. Last year's approval of a 5% pay raise for state employees was the second year in a row state employees received such an increase. Governor Kelly's proposed budget now under consideration by the Kansas Legislature includes another 5% increase for state workers.

These efforts are beginning to make a difference. KDOT's entry-level wages, when combined with on-the-job training, CDL sponsorship and benefit packages, are getting the attention of high school recruits. When marketing to young professionals and engineers, KDOT is able to demonstrate we're not "just a state job" and can more assertively bring attention to career opportunities and fulfilling work.

Data from 2023 shows KDOT is hiring more and employee retention is improving. The number of employees at KDOT increased nearly 6% from January 2022 to January 2023. That's a huge improvement. I'm optimistic the trend will continue.

The bottom line to these efforts is we know KDOT employees are working hard. Please know leadership is working hard for you, also. The system is not perfect and there's much to be done, but we're chipping away at it every chance we get.



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Inside the **LINES**



Beth Hughes
Wichita Metro Area
Office Manager

Duties at work?

I wear many hats - assist HR, dispatch for our KDOT staff, coordinate between agencies, maintain our inventory, assist with audits and oversee the area.

Favorite music?

I'm from Tampa, Florida, listen to a lot of EDM music/techno.

Most exciting part of your job?

Getting to work with a lot of different individuals and personalities.

Something you're proud of?

My double major - a bachelor's in homeland security/emergency management and an emphasis on drone technology.

Favorite food and movie?

I love sweet foods. And "Anne of Green Gables." I like anything involving history.

Any hobbies?

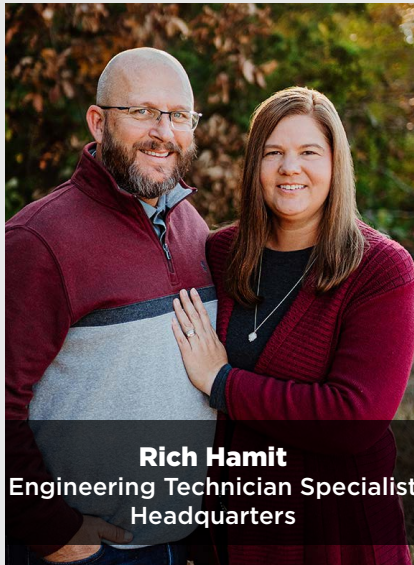
Reading, traveling and trying new foods. I volunteer to help families at the Ronald McDonald house and military spouses when spouses are deployed.

Any pets?

Two Chihuahuas - Copper and Remy.

Something people might not know about you?

My spouse and I own our own business. We sell gym and organic supplements. I am also a huge Disney freak. I have been to almost all the theme parks worldwide and Walt Disney World in Florida over 200 times.



Rich Hamit
Engineering Technician Specialist
Headquarters

Duties at work?

In the Bureau of Road Design - Coordinating Section, I review plans and coordinate utility relocations or adjustments on projects to be let.

Favorite music?

Contemporary Christian Music.

Most exciting part of job?

Working with a wide variety of KDOT staff in all districts as well as numerous utility companies.

Something you're proud of?

My kids and grandkids.

Favorite food and movie?

Chicken fried steak w/baked potato. "Vacation," and "Christmas Vacation."

Any hobbies?

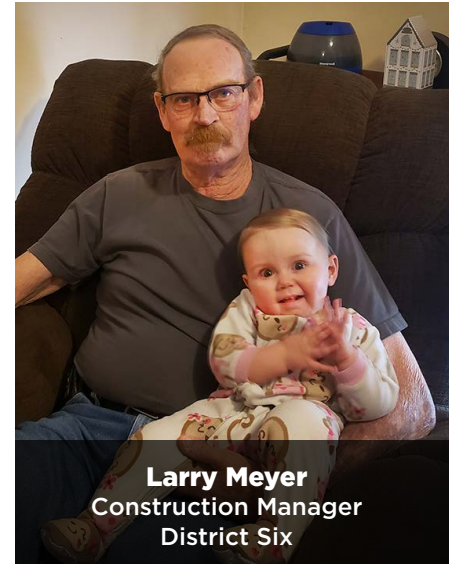
Photography and motorcycles.

Any pets?

A long-hair Dachshund named Jose.

Something people might not know about you?

In 2002, I rode my bicycle across Kansas (west to east). And, I have driven every state and federal highway in Kansas, both directions, three different times when working in my previous Videolog position.



Larry Meyer
Construction Manager
District Six

Duties at work?

At the Syracuse and Liberal construction offices, I administer construction contracts, oversee staffing and documentation of the contracts and work with contractor personnel to address any concerns.

Favorite music?

That old time rock 'n roll.

Most exciting part of your job?

Seeing the improvements we have made to our infrastructure since 1976.

Something you're proud of?

My grandchildren.

Favorite food and movie?

Red meat and fried potatoes. All the old westerns.

Any hobbies?

A bad day fishing beats a great day at work.

Any pets?

Not anymore, you get too attached to them.

Something people might not know about you?

I hate liver and onions. The last time my mother served it to me as a child, I threw up on the table with seven of us seated around it.



Charge Up!

NEVI announcement fills gap in Kansas EV infrastructure

By Mallory Goeke
Communications Specialist

Kansas' electric vehicle charging network has been given a charge of its own. More than \$4.6 million in federal funds will be directed to the first six locations selected for the state's National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Formula program.

With existing fast-charging stations spread across the I-70 and I-135 corridors, these selected locations will help fill in gaps along the state's Alternative Fuel Corridors (AFC) network to provide access and ultimately achieve "fully built out" status.

"As more electric cars and trucks make their way onto Kansas roadways, they will need access to adequate charging facilities," said Governor Kelly. "Our goal with these NEVI awards is to make sure electric vehicle charging stations are located along the interstate system as well as other major highways throughout the state."

Tami Alexander, Transportation Electrification Manager, said Electric Vehicle charging expansion helps Kansas stay competitive in attracting businesses and benefits tourism.

"Without adequate access to quick and convenient EV charging, the growing number of EV owners will bypass

The awarded projects are required to provide a minimum 20% local cash match, bringing the total investment to over \$5.8 million. Kansas NEVI award recipients are:

- Emporia, Flying J, U.S. 50/I-35**
- Garden City, Love's, U.S. 50/U.S. 400**
- Cherokee, Pete's, U.S. 400**
- Fredonia, Pete's, U.S. 400**
- Belleville, Love's, U.S. 81**
- Pratt, Casey's, U.S. 400**

Kansas," Alexander said. "Businesses, especially those with sustainability or decarbonization goals, may not consider Kansas if a lack of charging options is considered a deterrent to business plans and the ability to attract employees."

Alexander said businesses planning to electrify their vehicle fleets will look to states with good access to charging. She noted that while KDOT is using the NEVI Program to help fund the most expensive chargers – DC fast-chargers (DCFC) – along key travel corridors, other locations still need DCFC stations to enhance the state's overall charging network.

NEVI formula funds require EV charging stations to be available every 50 miles and within one travel mile of a designated AFC. Stations must be capable of charging four vehicles simultaneously, always be accessible to the public and provide travel amenities. When all AFCs in the state are certified as fully built out, KDOT may use funds for EV charging infrastructure on any public road or other publicly accessible locations.

Alexander said KDOT's Charge Up Kansas program is helping educate communities about available funding sources to support lower-power level 2 charging at businesses, retail centers, multi-unit housing and other locations.

Visit the [Charge Up Kansas website](https://www.chargeupks.com) to learn about Kansas' NEVI plans or contact ChargeUpKS@ks.gov.

Kansas Fast Charging Stations



⚡ NEVI Station Coming Soon ● NEVI Compliant Station ■ Other Fast Charging Station



Engaging with safety

Transportation safety conference returns in April

From rural road awareness, communicating with the socially disengaged, 911 dispatch, marijuana impacts on driving, to findings on vulnerable road users and more, the 29th annual Transportation Safety Conference on April 16-17 in Topeka offers something for everyone.

“We’d like to see increased attendance by KDOT employees across the state,” said Ingrid Vandervort, Safety Engagement Strategist in the Bureau of Transportation Safety. “There are many ways people can learn about various safety efforts taking place. That information can then be shared with others, which expands safety awareness even more.”

Several training and certification opportunities are available,

including new continuing education credits through the Kansas Board of Emergency Medical Services and American Institute of Certified Planners.

Managers’ approval is necessary to attend. A \$50 registration fee and travel expenses need to be covered by each office. Offices can register their attendees by emailing approved names to Vandervort by Feb. 29. After that date, attendees can register by going directly to the [website](#).

The website also lists all the sessions, trainings and certifications being offered.

For more information contact Vandervort at ingrid.vandervort@ks.gov.



Twelve communities receive Safe Routes to School grants

By Kim Stich
Senior Communications Manager

Helping improve infrastructure, safety education and more that promotes walking and biking to school are the goals of KDOT’s Safety Routes to School program. Twelve Kansas communities recently received grants to support this effort.

This is the first year applications have been accepted for the two types of SRTS Planning and Programming grants. Planning grants were awarded to the cities of Belle Plaine,

Emporia, Holton, Parsons and Rossville. Programming (Kick Start) grants were awarded to Dighton, Johnson City, Mission, Moundridge, Saint George, Topeka and Wichita.

Planning grants will help develop SRTS plans to study existing conditions, facilitate public outreach and find potential infrastructure and non-infrastructure solutions. Kick Start grants are designed to support initial programs, events and projects to help build the program in the future.

For information on the SRTS grant program, [click here](#).



IT'S HISTORY!

KDOT and public involvement



By **Samantha Peters**
Public Involvement Specialist

Public involvement for roadway projects has existed since the founding of the department in the early 1900s. Kansas's first PI liaisons were county-appointed citizens called "viewers" who met with locals when they petitioned the county for a road to be built.

The viewers would go out into the desired area, assess where the road would be located and meet with landowners to determine what damages would be owed to them. The viewers were also responsible for directing surveyors where to place markers for the road.

In 1929, Governor Clyde Reed gave the Kansas State Highway Commission the responsibility for the state highway system. However, it was not until the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 passed that the need for public involvement was required.

The act required the agency to hold public hearings when

an interstate was set to bypass or go through a town. As the population of Kansas began to grow, the need for public involvement increased as well.

In the late 1990s, KDOT began including public involvement efforts on many construction, maintenance and other projects to help address concerns from the public. Communications staff handled some activities. In addition, KDOT hired staff to focus directly on public involvement. That changed in 2012 with public involvement position cuts at the agency. Communications staff continued to assist consultant groups that handled much of the effort.

As part of the new 10-year IKE program passed in 2020, the process of selecting projects for the development pipeline every two years increased the need for public involvement activities. With the upsurge in projects, the need for public involvement within the agency rose as well. Within the last couple years, public involvement staff have become part of the agency again to work with communication staff and consultant groups in the effort to build toward a better future for all Kansans.

Seif named Director of Aviation



Ray Seif

Ray Seif was recently named the Director of Aviation for KDOT. In his new role, Seif is looking forward to working with local airports across the state.

"It's important to help airports improve their infrastructure and support the needs of the community," Seif said. "I'm passionate about working with stakeholders to grow workforce development opportunities."

Seif received a master's in aeronautical science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He is also a commercial, multi-instrument aircraft pilot.

Prior to his new position, Seif was the Manager at the Augusta Municipal Airport.

Before that, he served as the Manager at the Jasper County Airport in Indiana. He wants to share his experience, which helped him find ways to stretch budget dollars and improve airport operations.

In addition, his enthusiasm for providing aviation educational opportunities and outreach grew during this time.

"I'm interested in growing aviation as a whole and reaching our next generation to help bring people into the industry," he said.

He and his wife have two daughters, a son and two dogs. In his free time, Seif is involved with finding ways to reduce homelessness and increase affordable housing.



2024 ANNUAL REPORT
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ANNUAL REPORT APPENDIX
[CLICK HERE](#)



Secretary Reed briefs the House Transportation & Public Safety Budget Committee on Jan. 25.

The Kansas Legislature 2024 session is now underway, and legislators are in full swing hearing agency briefings and considering bills.

In the first few weeks of session, KDOT has been busy attending multiple committee hearings and tracking different bills. In addition to these activities, the agency has provided three KDOT 101 briefings by Secretary Calvin Reed to legislative transportation committees.

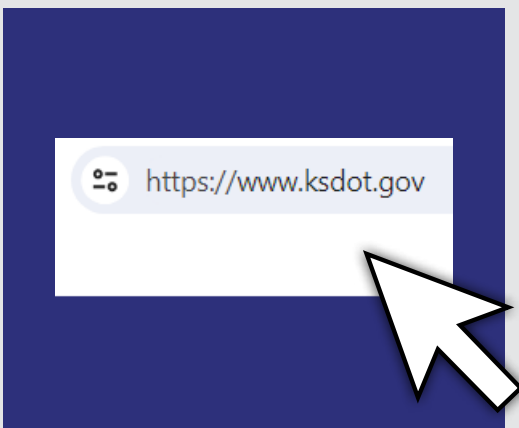
During those briefings, Secretary Reed updated the committee members on the important work our agency employees have been doing this last year and some of the work the agency has planned. The Secretary also presented to the House Appropriations Committee to provide an update on the IKE program. KDOT Aviation Director Ray Seif

provided a briefing to the Senate Transportation Committee on a recent report on airport infrastructure needs the agency has received.

A webpage on the KDOT internet site has been created where people can sign up to receive updates on bills that KDOT is tracking. Go to www.ksdot.gov, click on the Public Information tab on the top right of the page and go to [Legislative Update](#). Updates are posted here, and you can sign up to receive emails each time an update is posted.

Testimony and presentations provided by agency staff members can also be found under the Public Information tab at [Legislative Testimony](#). These links help to provide another outlet for people to stay informed on legislative information that involves KDOT.

KDOT webpages: Out with .org, in with .gov



The KDOT IT staff is nearing the end of transitioning all KDOT webpages to the .gov domain.

The update for all State of Kansas agency webpages to the .gov domain has been taking place for more than a year to improve security and continuity. For KDOT, ksdot.gov as part of the web address is now required for all offices that purchase a KDOT-related website domain, plan on getting one or work with consultants to create new agency webpages.

Users who type .org or use bookmarks with the old domain will be automatically redirected to the current webpage. Most Google and other search engines have updated to the new domain.

If you see a KDOT webpage not ending in .gov – such as .org, .com or .net – take note and please contact Steve Locke, KDOT project manager.

FIGHTING THE FORECAST

Battling winter weather not left up to chance



Photo by KDOT Multimedia Services

By **Troy Whitworth**
Director, Division of Safety

During the winter when I was a superintendent, I spent a lot of time looking at weather forecasts to decide whether to put operators on stand-by for weekends or send crews home, then have them come back to work that night.

Forecasts have improved, but there is still uncertainty on timing and amount of precipitation, and they change continuously as the event progresses.

Supervisors and superintendents rely on knowing event timing as well as types of precipitation and temperatures both before and during an event. Will it start as rain? Is pretreating an option? When will it freeze? This information helps with making decisions throughout the entire process.

There are two temperature forecasts used to make decisions: the air temperature forecast and the pavement forecast. The pavement forecast is the silver bullet for plow operators and supervisors. Air temperatures can be below freezing during the day, but pavement temperatures may not, and they are the ones that help decision makers know when chemicals will work best.

General planning and preparations take place each year before the snow flies. Then decisions must be made before and during every winter event. And sometimes the forecast doesn't go as expected, which causes crews to adjust on the fly. They work hard to be successful and meet the adversities and challenges of each new event head on.

Success doesn't happen by chance. It happens by a conscious effort to be the best we can be. For Your Family and Mine.



Cashless Tolling Update

Cashless tolling brings modernization to more than the road. KTA is working behind the scenes to establish new processes and customer tools. A recent news release announced:

- A new per-mile toll rate structure coming in July.
- Expanded call center hours from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- A refreshed K-TAG logo.



On the Road

CEO Steve Hewitt shared his latest "On the Road" [video update](#) on how KTA has incorporated customer feedback into the creation of a new online toll payment system, DriveKS. This new tool is still under development and will be released when cashless tolling begins this July. Visit www.DriveKS.com to learn about cashless tolling and how it will work.



Taking on SNICE Crews face white-out conditions

**By Kate Craft and
Delaney Tholen**

Winter weather may not have hit District One as hard as western Kansas, but K-99 in Marshall County was closed between U.S. 36 and the state line for five days due to white-out conditions in several areas. K-87 in Marshall County was also closed for a shorter duration.

There were lots of highway closings to handle as well throughout the rest of the region. An impressive number of hours were put in before, during and after the SNICE events.

All five District One area offices worked many days, around the clock, some not getting any break in between storms. They also assisted law enforcement responding to crashes, both in rural and metro areas.

“I was very pleased and proud of what I saw and heard. You guys really brought the ‘A’ game,” said District One Engineer



Northern counties of District One dealt with periods of complete white-out conditions during the winter weather events. This photo was taken at 10:30 a.m. near the U.S. 75/U.S. 36 junction in Brown County on Jan. 12. Photo courtesy of Kansas Highway Patrol, Troop B

Leroy Koehn in an email to district staff. “Know that the extremely important things we do at KDOT, in particular the snow/ice plowing, are absolutely noticed and appreciated by me and many others who too often don’t express that appreciation. So, I want to simply say thank you ... you made us all look good.”



Digging out
Crews from Area One work to remove snow from K-20 in Doniphan County. Around 8 inches of snow fell in the area from the two weather systems. Photo courtesy of Area One

Tow plow in action
KDOT has seven tow plows across the state to help clear multiple lanes at a time, like this one (at right) being used in the Kansas City metro.

Filling in
KDOT crews repair one of many potholes in the Kansas City metro following multiple snow and freeze/thaw events (far right). Photos by Delaney Tholen





Taking on SNICE

Passerby helps KDOT operator pinned under wing plow

By Ashley Perez

A KDOT snowplow operator faced a terrifying situation, which could have been much worse had it not been for a helpful, local farmer passing by.

Jake Smith, Engineering Technician Associate in Marion, was plowing K-15 in Marion County during a recent storm. He attempted to deploy the wing plow, but it failed - the wing was still chained to the truck. When Smith released it from the safety chain, the wing plow, which weighed more than 800 pounds, fell and pinned him to the ground.

Clyde Jost, a local farmer, and his wife, Sharon, were on their way home when he saw the plow parked on the side of the road and a person lying underneath it. Clyde tried to physically lift the plow off Smith and realized it was too heavy. Being familiar with hydraulics, Clyde used the controls

to lift the wing plow off Smith and transported him to the local hospital in Hillsboro. He was taken by ambulance to Wichita, and he was released a day later.

“Sharon and I were glad to be there when we were and that we were able to help where we could,” Clyde said. “We appreciate all the hard work you guys do to clear the roads for us.”

District Two Engineer Brent Terstriep said if it were not for Clyde’s act of heroism, Smith’s outcome could have been much worse.

“It is reassuring to know that while we are out doing what we can to battle the weather and provide a level of service the public expects that there are Kansans looking out for us as well,” Terstriep said.



Lifting the drifts

A KDOT plow operator clears K-140 in Saline County. Photo by Donnie Burkholder, Salina



Ready, set, snow

Crew members load up on salt and fuel to prepare for one of several snow events that affected District Two in January. Photos by Ashley Perez



Gates are lowered to close westbound I-70 at WaKeeney on Jan. 8. Photo courtesy KHP

Taking on SNICE District Three hit hard by winter storm

By Lisa Mussman

District Three did not have to wait long for its first significant snow event of 2024. A quick-moving system on Jan. 5 was just the warm-up act for several more rounds to come.

Heavy snow and high winds on Jan. 8 and 9 created blizzard conditions with near-zero visibility, making travel in the western third of the state nearly impossible. KDOT closed I-70 in both directions between WaKeeney and the Colorado border just after noon on Jan. 8. That closure was extended to Salina before crews were ready to fully reopen the interstate the following afternoon.

In Gove County, conditions deteriorated rapidly, leaving dozens of motorists stranded along I-70. The KHP requested KDOT crews in the area to assist with search and rescue to help move stranded travelers to safety.

KDOT also assisted with an ambulance transport for a critical patient from Oakley to Hays during the storm. With I-70 virtually impassable, a relay team of snowplow operators from the Oakley, Grainfield, WaKeeney and Hays subareas worked in tandem to clear the roadway for the ambulance to follow so the patient could be safely transported. The person later thanked the crews for their efforts.

Whiteout conditions and crashes briefly closed I-70 in Ellis and Russell counties on Jan. 11. A ground blizzard caused another closure on Jan. 18 as strong winds led to blowing snow, reduced visibility and flash freezing on I-70. Two KDOT snowplows and a KHP unit were hit over the course of the storms. No KDOT employees were hurt, however KHP K9 Igor was in the KHP unit when it was hit and received veterinary care. He is expected to be back in the line of duty soon.

I-70 project wins national award

By Lisa Mussman

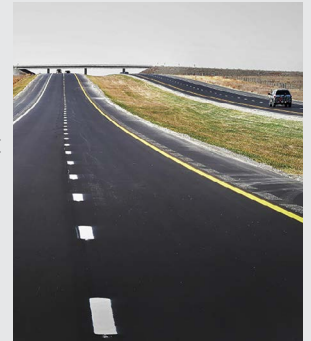
A northwest Kansas project has received the top paving award from the National Asphalt Pavement Association.

KDOT's District Three and APAC Kansas Inc., Shears Division, of Hutchinson were named the 2023 winners of the Sheldon G. Hayes Award for their work on I-70 in Gove County. The award has been presented annually since 1971 to recognize the nation's highest quality highway pavement projects.

"This award acknowledges what we Kansans have always known; Kansas contractors are second to none," said Secretary Calvin Reed. "It is the result of exceptional collaboration between Kansas-based industry partners and KDOT who completed the I-70 project with a high degree of skill and attention to detail."

The winner and finalists are determined through a two-year evaluation process. To be eligible, projects must use more than 50,000 tons of asphalt and be selected for a NAPA Quality in Construction Award the previous year. Projects are then evaluated for smoothness and inspected in person by an independent pavement consultant.

The Gove County project covered just over 9 miles of I-70 starting 4 miles east of Park and ending at the Trego County line.



I-70 in Gove County. Courtesy photo



U.S. 40 public meeting

District Construction Engineer Jim Riener discusses the upcoming bridge replacement project and road closure on U.S. 40 during a public meeting in Sharon Springs on Jan. 29. KDOT hosted the meeting to provide information and answer questions about the project, which is scheduled to begin in April. Photo by Lisa Mussman

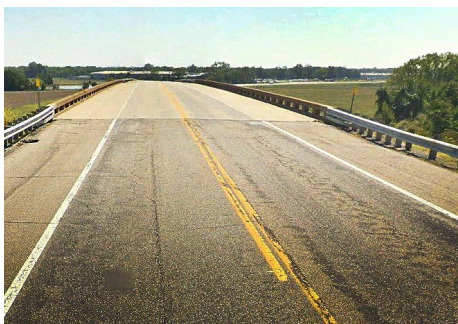


Narrow bridge on U.S. 59 being replaced

By Priscilla Petersen

In late January, KDOT began a project to replace an aging narrow bridge on U.S. 59 in Neosho County. The bridge, which spans the Neosho River, is located 2 miles south of Erie.

The old 28-foot-wide bridge, built in 1959, was closed to traffic for demolition on Jan. 30. Through the years, KDOT maintenance forces spent considerable time patching and resurfacing the deteriorated bridge deck. The bridge will be replaced



The UP Railroad overpass on U.S. 59 is being replaced in 2025, after work is completed on the Neosho River bridge. Photo courtesy of GoogleEarth

with a 44-foot-wide structure, which is expected to open in January 2025.

Traffic has been placed on a detour using K-39, K-169 and K-47. KDOT awarded the construction contract of \$11.2 million to A.M. Cohron & Son Inc. of Atlantic, Iowa.

The second U.S. 59 bridge replacement, originally scheduled to begin at the same time as the Neosho River bridge project, has been delayed. The UP overpass on U.S. 59 north of Parsons will let this November, with construction beginning in 2025.

The two bridge projects were separated after considering concerns from county officials and the traveling public about closing such a large section of the busy highway, and the lengthy detour route the two bridge closures would require.



The Neosho River bridge on U.S. 59 south of Erie has undergone many deck repairs in recent years. The bridge was closed to traffic on Jan. 30. The new bridge will be completed early next year. Photo by Priscilla Petersen

Oni joins Pittsburg construction office



Bukola Oni

Bukola Oni has joined KDOT as an Engineering Associate II at the Pittsburg construction office. She received her Ph.D. in civil engineering from Iowa State University.

While pursuing her doctorate, Oni participated in a Transportation

Research Board competition, where her team placed first in the development of culvert asset management tools incorporated into Transportation Asset Management Plans for state departments of transportation. She holds two master's degrees in civil engineering focused on sustainable construction and construction engineering.



Ice causes slick roads, cancellations

Although the previous week's major snowstorm did not impact southeast Kansas as significantly as the rest of the state, freezing rain at the onset of the next week made up for the omission. Wintry precipitation fell Sunday night of Jan. 21 through Monday morning, with the region awakening to ice-covered roadways and treacherous driving conditions. Many schools and businesses were closed over the next two days while KDOT cleared and treated the state highways. This photo, posted on Facebook by the Kansas Highway Patrol Troop H in Chanute, shows a semi slide-off - one of many vehicle incidents to occur during the ice event - along the mirror-like U.S. 59 in Neosho County.



Taking on SNICE

A blizzard account: “And the next thing I know, I feel the truck dip”

By Tim Potter

The blizzard starting Jan. 8 put Larned Subarea Supervisor Jeremy McDonald in a place he had never been before.

McDonald’s experience helps illustrate why District Five took the unusual step that night of closing all the highways in seven counties and some highways in three counties.

The fierce wind and blinding snow hit “all the sudden about 5 o’clock” that Monday, he recounted. McDonald was driving a plow truck west on U.S. 56 toward Garfield. The veteran supervisor teaches his crew that when in a disorienting storm, “go by the feel of the road,” get bearings from where the crown of the road and rumble strips lie. That evening he guided himself by the centerline rumble strips, creeping along at maybe 5 mph.

“And the next thing I know,” he recalled, “I feel the truck dip.”

McDonald didn’t realize at first that just as he passed the wind block of a shelter belt, the sheer force of the prairie blizzard pushed his plow truck across the oncoming, eastbound lane and into the ditch on the other side of the highway. Two vehicles trailing him followed right after him, into the ditch as well. “I led them down the wrong path,” he said. But no one was hurt, the ditch sits on a gradual slope.

“In 23 years of working here (at KDOT), that’s the first time I put a plow truck into the ditch because I lost all knowledge of where the road was,” he said. “I’ve seen deeper snows, but

I’ve never seen snow like this” – so disorienting.

McDonald wasn’t the only one losing visibility. “It was to a point where the guys driving the trucks that night couldn’t see – you literally couldn’t see 2 feet in front of you,” said Mitch Jenkins, Great Bend Area Superintendent.

At Pratt, Area Superintendent Leisa Mauch – monitoring the storm and her crew – spent the night at the shop because she didn’t trust her vehicle to get her home in such a storm.

“It was whiteout conditions,” Mauch recalled. The wind howled, rattled the shop doors and built up a snowbank against the walk-through door. “I’ve never seen that many roads closed down. People just needed to stay put.”

In some of the hardest hit areas of District Five, crews had to wait for visibility to improve enough to resume plowing. In other areas, the conditions allowed crews to keep rolling.

By the next evening, crews managed to reopen all but one small stretch of highway – where the snow had drifted to 5 feet.



Larned Subarea Supervisor Jeremy McDonald had an interesting SNICE run on Jan. 8 thanks to a blinding blizzard. Photo by Miguel Ibarra, Larned

Three passing lane projects planned on U.S. 54

By Tim Potter

Starting this summer, motorists should be able to start using three new or extended U.S. 54 passing lanes in Pratt and Kiowa counties.

The lanes near Mullinville in Kiowa County will be entirely new. The other projects involve extensions of existing passing lanes. The projects total nearly \$20 million.

Crews began work on box extensions on the western-most project near Mullinville in October. Recently, they have been doing the extensions on the project between Greensburg and

Haviland, said Area One Engineer Scott Mullen. Earthwork will begin once weather allows.

The projects are located west of Mullinville and between Greensburg and Haviland in Kiowa County, and west of Cullison in Pratt County. Venture Corp. of Great Bend, is the primary contractor for all three projects.

Mullen noted the projects east of Greensburg and west of Cullison are connected to a separate project that will provide surfacing on existing lanes where the passing lanes are being built.



Preliminary work, as of mid-January, on the U.S. 54 passing lane project west of Mullinville. Photo by Doug Coates, Pratt

DISTRICT FIVE/SOUTH CENTRAL KANSAS

The Wichita metro saw its first snow of 2024 on Jan. 5. Crews were busy preparing equipment the day before and monitored conditions throughout the night. The first snow began falling in the metro area around 3 a.m.

Right, Wichita West crew members attach a wing plow to a truck on Jan. 4 in preparation for upcoming winter weather.

Below, KAKE TV reporter Leon Purvis shoots video of crews prepping for winter weather on Jan. 4. He was among many reporters who visited the shops and provided KDOT updates during the storm. Photos by Tracy Statton



Above right, a truck reloads with salt at the Wichita West shop. Crews were out monitoring conditions all night and into the early morning hours of Jan. 5.

Below, snow falls while a Wichita metro area plow clears the highway on Jan. 5. Higher road temperatures helped keep the precipitation from freezing on the pavement. Area Five Superintendent David Lechner called it a successful SNICE event as crews were able to easily break it up and clear it off of the roadways. Photos by Tracy Statton



Longshaw retires from KDOT



Congratulations to Wichita Metro Engineer Mike Longshaw (left), who retired from KDOT on Jan. 31 after 21 years of service. Longshaw is pictured with District Five Engineer Nick Squires. Photo by Beth Hughes



Taking on SNICE **Snowstorm closes all southwest Kansas highways**

By Yazmin Moreno

On Jan. 8, a severe storm swept most of the state. The western third of the state experienced the worst of the storm's impact. Highways in southwest Kansas were closed one by one due to relentless high winds, low visibility, white-out conditions and snow-packed road conditions. As the day progressed, the storm's intensity increased, and all sections of highways in southwest Kansas had to be closed. Those closures would remain in place overnight.

The storm caused hundreds of vehicles to be stranded on highways, which added to the emergency situation. To mitigate the crisis, crews worked tirelessly with local law enforcement to move the vehicles and clear the highways.

It was not until the next day that the district was able to see any progress in clearing the highways. Abandoned vehicles in the middle of highways across the region posed a significant challenge to snow removal, but as the day went on, many of the highways were opened to traffic.

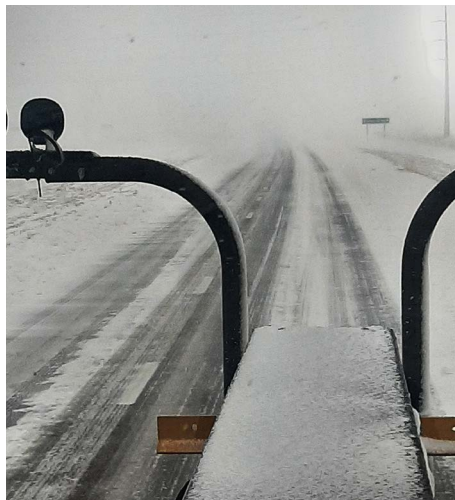
Though the roads were open, icy and snow-packed conditions persisted, making travel difficult. The region continued to experience other weather systems throughout the week, which resulted in additional highway closures and bitterly cold temperatures.



Snowed in
Above, more than 60 vehicles were stranded on U.S. 400 in Ford County. Photo by Galen Ludlow, Dodge City. Left, snow along K-4 north of Scott City partially buried this stranded truck. The area received up to 14 inches of snow. Photo by Hector Terrones, Garden City

Working through the storm

At right, while stopped for a moment at the beginning of the storm, Garden City Subarea Supervisor Hector Terrones took a photo showing the decreasing visibility on U.S. 50 in Finney County. At far right, U.S. 83 in Finney County was snow-packed for a while after the storm.





Lots of information was available for attendees to review about the U.S. 50 expansion project during the Jan. 18 open house in Dodge City. Photo by Yazmin Moreno

KDOT hosts bilingual open house in Dodge City

By Yazmin Moreno

KDOT hosted a bilingual open house on Jan. 18 for the expansion of U.S. 50 east of Dodge City. The meeting focused on exploring various concepts to enhance the intersections in the area and expand U.S. 50.

More than 90 people attended, including local residents, business owners, community leaders and other stakeholders. They received handouts and had the opportunity to interact with project staff and ask questions. All meeting materials were presented bilingually.

The U.S. 50 expansion project is currently in its discovery phase. The main objective of this project is to enhance safety and mobility and to accommodate increasing traffic demands. The project team will continue working with the public as project plans progress.

U.S. 83 technology project

To discuss the U.S. 83 freight technology project from Garden City to Oakley, KDOT hosted an advisory group meeting in Scott City on Jan. 23. The meeting brought together stakeholders in person and online from the transportation industry, including shippers, carriers and logistics providers, in addition to representatives from government agencies. Participants discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing these technologies, as well as the potential benefits for the region's economy and transportation network. Photo by Yazmin Moreno



New hires – December

Headquarters

Terrance Huss, Engineering Technician, Bureau of Traffic Engineering

Brandon Jacobs, Engineering Technician, Bureau of Right of Way

Michael Salerno III, Administrative Assistant, Office of Chief Counsel

District One

Randall Call, Equipment Operator Trainee, Tecumseh

Trenton Calvaruzo, Equipment Operator, Alma

Treyvon Duncan, Utility Worker, Edwardsville

Andrew Langston, Equipment Operator Trainee, Topeka

Christopher Nix, Refrigeration and A/C Service Technician Senior, Topeka

Derek Tuck, Equipment Operator, Holton

Scott Warren, Equipment Operator, Osage City

District Two

Sawyer Cole, Engineering Technician Associate, Salina

Terry Malek, Equipment Operator, Beloit

Zachary Owen, Equipment Operator Trainee, Council Grove

Jack Parks, Engineering Technician Associate, Marion

District Three

Richard Bouchey, Land Surveyor II, Norton

Beau Gardner, Equipment Operator, Sharon Springs

Blake Jackson, Equipment Operator Trainee, Norton

Aidan Moraru, Equipment Operator Trainee, Hoxie

Shannon Schurr, Equipment Operator, Sharon Springs

District Four

Shawn Butell, Equipment Operator Trainee, Ottawa

Montana Cummings, Engineering Technician Associate, Independence

Jeffrey Fischer, Area Engineer, Pittsburg

Alec Pennington, Equipment Operator Trainee, Louisburg

Billy Stewart, Equipment Operator Trainee, Sedan

District Five

Nicholas Akins, Equipment Operator, El Dorado

Donovan Caddell, Engineering Technician Associate, Wichita

Kevin Mason, Equipment Operator Trainee, Newton

Landon McNown, Equipment Operator Trainee, El Dorado

Jonathon Ploutz, Equipment Operator, Larned

Johanna Reed, Engineering Technician Associate, Winfield

District Six

Joseph Cano, Equipment Operator, Ulysses

Tyler Cooley, Equipment Operator, Scott City

Kaelon Martinez, Equipment Operator, Liberal

Andres Vazquez, Equipment Mechanic, Ulysses

Retirees

The following employee is retiring on March 1.

District Four

Earl Barnett, Equipment Operator Specialist, Mound City

Condolences



Debra Detwiler

Condolences to the family and friends of KDOT employee **Debra Detwiler**, of Topeka. She passed away on Jan. 29 in Topeka. Detwiler was a Property Appraiser I in the Bureau of Right of Way. She worked at KDOT for more than four years, starting in 2019. Detwiler was a huge fan of the Kansas City Chiefs. She had attended games since the 1990s. Detwiler enjoyed taking people to their first game in person at Arrowhead stadium. Survivors

include a son, two brothers, a sister and numerous nieces, cousins and friends.

Condolences to the family and friends of KDOT retiree **Gene Howe**, who passed away on Dec. 7, 2023, in Clay Center. Howe started at KDOT in 1957 and worked for more than 44

years. He was an Equipment Operator II at the Manhattan Subarea. Howe retired in 2001.

Condolences to the family and friends of KDOT retiree **Harlan Hobbs**, who passed away on Jan. 12 in Phillipsburg. Hobbs started with KDOT in 1965 and retired in 1995 as an Engineering Technician at the Phillipsburg Construction Office. He also worked part time for KDOT after his retirement until 2005.

Condolences to the family and friends of KDOT retiree **David Meggers**, who passed away on Jan. 17 in Topeka. Meggers started at KDOT in 1989 and worked for more than 31 years. He retired in 2021 as the Bureau Chief of Research.

Condolences to the family and friends of KDOT retiree **Linda Cox**, who passed away Jan. 20 in Topeka. Cox started in 1978 at KDOT and worked more than 40 years. She was an Administrative Specialist in the Bureau of Human Resources. Cox retired in 2018.

Promotions/transfers – December

Headquarters

Marcy Anderson, Management Analyst III, Division of Program and Project Management

Dahlia Gray, Engineering Technician, Bureau of Construction and Materials

Lynda High, Engineering Technician, Bureau of Construction and Materials

Thomas Knudsen, Engineering Technician Midpoint, Bureau of Construction and Materials

Jason Kolb, Regional Geologist, Bureau of Structures and Geotechnical Services

Patty Schalk, Applications Development Supervisor, Office of Information Technology Services

Chase Shelby, Safety Specialist, Division of Safety

Kollean Stewart, District HRP Lead, Bureau of Human Resources

Levi Tate, Engineering Technician, Bureau of Right of Way

Thomas Trull, Engineering Technician Specialist, Bureau of Road Design

Benjamin Workman, Engineering Technician Specialist, Bureau of Structures and Geotechnical Services

District One

Moises Gingoyon, Engineering Associate II, Wamego

Robert Griffin, Engineering Technician Supervisor, Topeka

Gavin Johnson, Highway Maintenance Supervisor, Marysville

Fernando Limon, Refrigeration and AC Service Technician Senior, Topeka

Dale Musick, Equipment Operator Specialist, Topeka

William Rice, Engineering Technician, Emporia

District Two

Gregory Albert, Equipment Operator Senior, Lincoln

Wesley Bessette, Equipment Operator, McPherson

Gordon Boyer III, Equipment Operator Midpoint, Lincoln

Clifford Gustus Jr., Equipment Operator Midpoint, Ellsworth

Keith Hubler, Highway Maintenance Superintendent, Clay Center

Joshawa Worley, Equipment Operator, Minneapolis

District Three

Marc Roulier, Highway Maintenance Supervisor, Russell

Roland Washburn, Equipment Operator Specialist, Norton

District Four

Timothy Camp, Equipment Operator, Erie

Jay Jackman, Equipment Operator Senior, Chanute

Christopher Owen, Engineering Technician, Pittsburg

Dustin Willis, Engineering Technician, Independence

District Five

David Drandt, Equipment Operator Specialist, Wichita

Michael Harrison, Equipment Mechanic, El Dorado

Levi Murray, Equipment Operator Specialist, Greensburg

Lee Rose, Equipment Operator, Kingman

Craig Schartz, Construction Engineer Associate (EA III), Great Bend

Kristian Whisenhunt, Engineering Technician, Wichita

District Six

Joseph Cano, Equipment Operator, Rolla

Milestones – February

50 years

Darrell Gwaltney, Engineering Technician Specialist, Topeka

35 years

John Hutchison, Equipment Operator Specialist, WaKeeney

Joe Palic, Area Engineer, Marion

Nat Velasquez Jr., Professional Civil Engineer II, Topeka

30 years

Brian Huiting, Highway Maintenance Supervisor, Osborne

Neil Schroll, Highway Maintenance Supervisor, Syracuse

25 years

James Parrish, Engineering Technician Supervisor, Bonner Springs

Amy Smith, Public Service Executive I, Topeka

20 years

Kade Cooper, Highway Maintenance Supervisor, Belleville

Polly Jones, Land Survey Coordinator, Topeka

Luke Metheny, Chief Geotechnical Engineer, Topeka

15 years

Daniel Moore, Construction Manager, Phillipsburg

10 years

Bradley Alford, Highway Maintenance Supervisor, Tecumseh

Jacob Bigler, Information Systems Manager II, Topeka

Wayne Blackburn, Professional Civil Engineer I, Topeka

Nicholas Eastwood, Equipment Operator Senior, Altoona

Rowden Glaser, Engineering Technician Specialist, Chanute

Phyllis Griffey, ROW Property Appraiser II, Topeka

Matthew Peach, Equipment Operator Senior, La Crosse