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Brian VanFosson, left, and Tyler Padgitt are among businesspeople who are concerned about the removal of access points that serve their organizations along U.S. Highway 60.



Businesspeople sound alarm on MoDOT plans along Highway 60

Removal of access points would hinder growth, they say, as highway department points to safety concerns, freeway considerations



BY: GEOFF PICKLE, DIGITAL EDITOR | gpickle@sbj.net (<mailto:gpickle@sbj.net>)

Posted online February 7, 2025 | 9:00 am

Heading east on U.S. Highway 60, beyond the U.S. Highway 65 interchange, lies a growing pocket of business activity and the potential for future development of hundreds of acres on Springfield's southeast side. Businesspeople with stakes in the outcome are calling attention to roadway changes in the works by the Missouri Department of Transportation that they say would disrupt their business interests.



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EDITORS' PICK



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Open for Business: The War Zone Springfield (/stories/open-for-business-the-war-zone-springfield,98597)

Nerf gaming venue The War Zone Springfield LLC changed ownership; Springfield investment advisory firm SignalPoint Asset Management LLC joined a platform operated by New York-based Farther; and Springfield Art Museum set up shop at its temporary home.

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MoDOT is in the early stages of the initiative, which calls on the removal of driveways and intersections with direct Highway 60 access along the stretch from 60/65 to Route 125 in Rogersville, with the existing interchange at Routes NN/J serving as the only access point to Highway 60, according to a June 2023 draft document of the plan. The plan would add outer roads from NN/J, with the goal of achieving a freeway classification for Highway 60, according to the document.

Tyler Padgitt, lead pastor at The Courageous Church, is among a group of community leaders and businesspeople who are concerned about the MoDOT plans. He has been in communication with MoDOT and its Southwest District office in Springfield, as well as the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission that governs the state transportation department, to express his opposition to the work. Among his chief concerns is the fact that NN/J is not visible from the church and other impacted businesses, meaning church patrons and business customers headed east out of Springfield would have to drive over a mile to access the NN/J interchange and utilize outer roads to travel the same distance back.

“I feel like I’m fighting for a key corridor of our city,” Padgitt said. “I know the potential it has. I know that Springfield needs to grow.”

The Courageous Church opened its south location in 2016 at 4900 S. Farm Road 189. The church campus is accessible through the Farm Road 189 intersection, which crosses over Highway 60. It’s an area of growth, as evidenced by a newly renovated Citizens Bank of Rogersville branch, BP Builders LLC’s headquarters and signage pointing to the availability of around 600 acres of land that businessperson Larry Childress has long sought to develop. Just west of Farm Road 189 is Highland Springs Boulevard, which has direct access to Highway 60 and serves as the entrance for the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame and its annual Price Cutter Charity Championship, The City Studios salon, Highland Springs Country Club and dozens of high-end homes in the neighborhood surrounding the golf course. Farther east is Farm Road 193, where an intersection on Highway 60 leads to Dollar General and Heritage Tractor locations.

Safety concerns and solutions

Speaking from MoDOT’s Southwest District office at 3025 E. Kearney St., project manager Bud Sherman said the roadway initiative is twofold: it would assist the department in updating Highway 60 to a freeway designation from what’s “classified now as more of an expressway” and improve safety along the route.

“We have to find a way to be able to make that safer, and that’s MoDOT’s role,” he said. “We’re not in this to play politics. We’re in this to make sure we have a safe roadway system.”

Indeed, vehicles travel at high speeds along Highway 60 as they head toward Springfield or Rogersville, and those making entrances and exits along the stretch must pay close attention when joining or leaving the highway from the currently existing access points.

The summer 2023 draft report from MoDOT states as follows: “The crash reduction factor for constructing outer roads to the project corridor and removing at-grade access points does lower the chances of crashes happening by 57%.”

Data provided by the Missouri State Highway Patrol’s Research and Development Division shows 170 total crashes 2014-24 at the Highway 60 intersections of Highland Springs Boulevard and Farm Roads 189 and 193, comprising 84 crashes at

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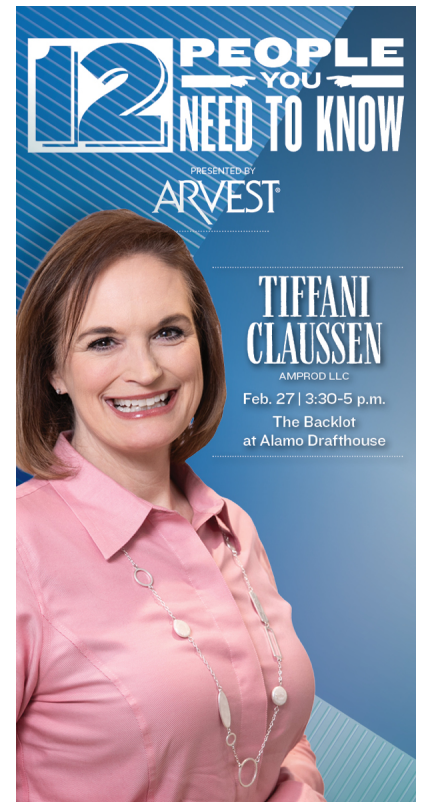
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Highland Springs Boulevard, 45 crashes at Farm Road 193 and 41 crashes at Farm Road 189. In those crashes, 87 involved injuries and one was fatal. An RDD official noted that 2024 data is preliminary and subject to change.

Padgitt and Brian VanFosson, president of Citizens Bank of Rogersville, say they, too, would like to see safety upgrades along the stretch of Highway 60 – but not at the expense of their business interests.

“You’ve got engineers making economic decisions. They leverage safety as a mechanism of control,” Padgitt said.

He suggested the installation of an exit at Farm Road 189 or Highland Springs Boulevard as possible alternatives.

“You have to have some economic consideration and not just what’s easiest,” Padgitt said. “It requires them to listen and consider and not get a head of steam.”

VanFosson concurred with Padgitt’s assessment.

“Both of us have a lot to gain with safety increases. We’re certainly aware that it’s not safe. We’ve had accidents in front of our bank many times. It is a big hazard to everyone trying to turn into 189,” VanFosson said. “It is imperative to evaluate other options. If we can get ahead of the curve and start working with MoDOT early, we can make changes and get the best possible alternative.”

Sherman said the Highway 60 project is funded through Statewide Transportation Improvement Program funds. The MoDOT draft document points to a projected cost of \$22.7 million for freeway improvements from NN/J to Farm Road 223, near Route 125; \$28.9 million for freeway improvements from 60/65 to NN/J; and \$5.8 million to reduce flooding along Highway 60 between NN/J and Farm Road 223. The document specifically states that an interchange would not be built at Farm Road 189 under the plan.

Sherman said anything beyond the scope of the work in the draft document isn’t currently funded through STIP.

“The only other option that could be considered is the possibility of an interchange, but that’s not what’s funded,” Sherman said. “To get an interchange in there that’s less than 2 miles, it requires a lot of in-depth study.”

MoDOT officials say public feedback will be collected later this year through planned in-person and online opportunities.

According to Sherman, the tentative schedule calls for the Highway 60 project to be bid in fall 2028, with construction expected to start the following year and wrap up early next decade.

Business impacts

Should the Highway 60 initiative continue as planned and remove access points, Padgitt and VanFosson say the existing business activity would be severely altered, to the point of potential closures.

The Citizens Bank of Rogersville branch at the Farm Road 189 exit underwent a more than \$1 million renovation 2023-24, said VanFosson. He said that while bank officials knew of the possibility that access could be removed in the future, the board had to make a decision to improve a building “in disrepair.”

“We didn’t know at what point in time it would implement its plans,” he said.

“MoDOT has a history of not being forthcoming on when their plans are going to be implemented. We had to make a financial decision to either vacate the building at that point in time or do the renovation.”

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Now, as MoDOT's plans are becoming more concrete, VanFosson is concerned that the bank's investment will be for naught.

"People are not going to drive an ... outer road to get to Citizens Bank of Rogersville," he said. "We will have to shut down our location. I do not see how we could survive."

While Padgitt said he thinks Courageous Church would survive the MoDOT changes, the Highway 60 initiative "would make us evaluate whether we would expand at this location." Noting a recent Sunday service drew some 800 congregants, he said the church has some 13.5 acres of potential expansion area.

Padgitt added that adverse effects on businesses in the area would be impactful for Springfield as a whole as developers seek sites and land becomes scarce within city limits.

"This area could be a very well-done, master-planned, upscale part of the southeast side of Springfield, or it could be a rural castoff," he said. "I'd hate for this area to become desolate and not economically viable."

Padgitt, who initially contacted the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission in a mid-January letter, provided copies of the correspondence that included a reply from MoDOT dated Jan. 24. In his initial letter, Padgitt identified concerns that include impacts on prime development land and accessibility to businesses and Highland Springs residences. He specifically noted potential impacts to the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame and its PCCC golf tournament.

"The Missouri Sports Hall of Fame, located within this corridor, would be severely affected by the proposed changes, potentially leading to its closure," Padgitt wrote in the letter to the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission. "The loss of access would force the relocation of the Price Cutter Charity Championship golf tournament and other events hosted at Highland Springs. This would diminish Springfield's cultural offerings and harm local tourism and the economy, as these events could be moved to Branson or other areas."

Padgitt further noted in the letter that Highland Springs developer John Q. Hammons crafted an agreement with MoDOT that "guarantees continued direct access to Highway 60."

He wrote, "Any plan to remove such access would violate this agreement and set a troubling precedent for future projects."

Rob Marsh, MSHOF's executive director, did not respond to requests for comment for this article. Childress, who is seeking to develop land in the area, was unavailable for comment by press time. Officials with Highland Springs and the residences contained within also could not be reached.

The response to Padgitt's letter was penned by Stacy Reese, district engineer for MoDOT's Southwest District.

"MoDOT works closely with our partners like the city of Springfield, Greene County, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce and the Ozarks Transportation Organization to ensure we are working together and in support of both economic development and long-term transportation needs," Reese wrote. "MoDOT welcomes interaction with the public, and any businesses that may have concerns regarding the project. We will continue to engage through our public outreach efforts and have plans to hold our first public meeting later this year."

Comments

Your name
