

Four-lane roads could help with rural development

Kansas is blessed with a good highway system these days. It's the work of many people, but a couple of governors deserve special credit: Mike Hayden, who gave us the first comprehensive transportation plan, though it may have cost him his job, and Bill Graves, who kicked off the second, current plan.

Hayden inherited a rapidly declining highway system in the 1980s, and set about saving it. The result was an eight-year plan which put Kansas back on top of the transportation world. He also brought a professional focus to the new Department of Transportation. No longer run by a politically appointed commission, the department was free to focus on facts.

And that has brought Kansas a very good road system. Spending decisions are based on traffic flows and road condition, and our highways are in as good a shape as they've ever been.

Try driving in any adjacent state if you don't believe this. Visitors, from other states, and from around the world, praise Kansas highways.

There is a tradeoff in this focus on engineering, however. It means that the highway system, outside the major metro areas at least, is pretty much frozen as is.

Money goes to maintenance first, and upgrading primary routes second. There is precious little left over to expand the system or promote the economy of any Kansas town. Competition was fierce for the \$100 million a year or so in "enhancement" projects.

This means the status quo reigns. And many towns are on the outside, looking in.

Kansas blessed a relatively small slice of the state when it chose the routes for the Interstate system back in the 1950s. Did anyone then appreciate how much the new freeways would concentrate traffic?

In the years since, roadside businesses and industry both have flocked to the Interstate corridors. The areas along other, once-busy east-west routes have withered. Few new motels and restaurants, and even fewer plants, have been built.

The Bill Bennett era of the 1970s produced a grand plan for a Kansas freeway system serving all parts of the state, especially the hard-to-drive-to regions of the southeast and northeast.

Some of these roads were actually begun. Isolated segments exist on U.S. 75, U.S. 69, U.S. 169 and even U.S. 36, marked by expensive concrete pavement, four-lane rights-of-way and soaring bridges that carry county roads over nothing much.

With the Bennett freeway plan died the idea of building roads to draw business to poor parts of the state. We traded that for good, basic, solid two-lanes.

In most areas, that's what we need.

There are opportunities, though, and there are prospects for economic development. U.S. 81 is an example; it's four lanes to the Nebraska border today because of political influence, not traffic. It was built to draw business, and improve safety, pushed by powerful interests along the road.

And that may not be a bad idea. There's evidence that if you build it, they will come.

The rest of the state is watching the U.S. 81 experiment, because there are a lot of places which could use better roads, especially southeast Kansas, where Independence, Parsons and Pittsburg struggle with two-lane access while southwest Missouri has a freeway to Kansas City.

The northern tier of counties along U.S. 36 falls into this category, too, underserved and underdeveloped.

The state could change that. — Steve Haynes

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Good memories go home with her

It was a happy homecoming for my six-year-old granddaughter, Taylor. She had been with us for the last three weeks and her parents were "itching" to get their hands on her again.

When we pulled into the driveway at their home in Texas, her mother couldn't wait to grab Taylor up, and hug and kiss her profusely.

While all that smooching was going on, Taylor looked at me over her mom's shoulder and said, "I knew she'd be like this."

Taylor's independence is a double-edged sword for her parents. They have raised her to be so, but then when she is, it hurts them when she gets along so well without them.

They needn't worry. Taylor knows exactly where her foundation is. It's in them. She loves her cousins, her aunts and uncles, Nonni (her other grandmother), Pa-Pa and G'ma, but her parents are her family.

One night during her bath, I asked what she thought of her friend Peyton's brothers. She thought they were okay. So I asked her if she ever wanted a brother or sister.

Thoughtfully, she answered, "I wouldn't mind a baby sister, but I don't want to share my parents."

Taylor is the kind of little kid I would like even if she weren't my granddaughter. Her father and mother (my daughter, Kara) are fairly strict. And except for a propensity to interrupt while others are talking, Taylor is very well-behaved. She talks easily with adults and makes friends instantly with other kids. During her stay, I observed that Taylor is definitely the leader of the pack. More than once I heard her tell playmates, "Okay, this what we're

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



gonna do."

An example of her independence, tempered by her parents' influence, involves her lifejacket. Taylor admits she doesn't know how to swim, but she loves the water. Going to the pool is one of her most favorite things. We were headed to the pool one day, and I was reminding her of the rule. "You can't go in the water without your jacket, okay?"

"I know, G'ma."
"Now, promise me Taylor," I went on. "You won't go into the water without your lifejacket."

"Grandma," she exhaled with attitude, "I won't make a bad decision."

Well, okay then. I guess there was nothing more to say.

I realized how busy we had kept her when, this morning, in her own home, she said, "Guess what, G'ma. I don't have to go a-a-n-n-y-y-place today. I can just stay home and play."

It's true we kept her on our life's fast-paced treadmill and threw in a few extras for her benefit. She attended three different vacation Bible schools, took piano lessons from Miss Sonya, and for the grand finale, went to a wedding Saturday evening.

The wedding was a wonderful celebration with many details planned for their guests' enjoyment, especially the chil-

dren. The theme was a fairy-tale wedding with castles, a prince and a princess. Not only were there Cinderella gummy candies and cheese hearts for snacks, there was a real, kid-sized castle and a table full of color crayons and princess-themed coloring books.

When we first walked into the hall where the party was being held, Taylor looked at the table loaded with kid-friendly items. She tugged on my sleeve and whispered, "G'ma, I think we're going to do crafts."

She had a ball. I let her take some pictures and she did an excellent job. That earned her a lot of prestige with the other kids, because she also figured out how to play the pictures back on the digital camera. The food was even kid-friendly. What child (or grown-up for that matter) wouldn't like spaghetti for a meal? She cleaned her plate and was still eager for the cake.

She especially liked the toasts made by the best man and the maid of honor. Everyone in the hall received a champagne glass of non-alcoholic sparkling apple juice. "I drank seven juices," she announced.

Then she and a new friend, named Dallas, discovered the art of stacking champagne glasses. It's a good thing the "glasses" were made of plastic because they came tumbling down, several times.

After doing "The Chicken Dance" and "The Hokey Pokey," the evening finally came to an end and we headed for home. Skipping to the car Taylor said, "That was the BEST party I ever went to, in my whole life."

It was a great party, but the best experiences are yet to come.

Privacy act is a double edged sword

A woman from our church was hospitalized last month and most of us just found out. HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, strikes again. The act, which is designed to protect our privacy, is doing its job, but it has a cost.

I understand the need for privacy, but the legal and medical professions already are obligated to practice confidentiality.

No one would argue the necessity of guarding a person's private information, but it does seem a bit ridiculous when we can walk down the halls of the hospital and see who is a patient, but we can't call and ask.

This is not a local situation — it is a nationwide epidemic.

What is interesting is when reading the summary of this act on the HIPAA website produced by the government, the act is described as a protection of a

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



patient's information on "electronic health transactions."* In other words, limited access to claims, diagnosis, etc.

How could something designed to protect medical information and insure the privacy to protect an individual's medical coverage have gone so wrong? Before long we will be required to take a taxi and wear a mask when we go for medical treatment.

One of the beauties of small town life and the reason people try to find "commu-

nities" within a city is the need for interaction with their neighbor. This act, as it is now practiced, chips away at our right to compassion.

The idea to protect our medical information in order to prevent employers and insurance companies from using it to deny us coverage or treatment is admirable and necessary. Big business does not always have the same desire for compassion as our neighbors.

But when our paranoia overrides our common sense, we all lose out. What started as a guide has become a monster and one affecting us all.

I am reminded of Mark Twain's quote, "Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated."

"How would I know?"
*http://www.cms.hhs.gov/hipaa/hipaa2/general/background/h3103sum.asp

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