

Transportation secretary visits employees, area

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

Kansas Secretary of Transportation Deb Miller traveled through northwest Kansas, District 3 of the transportation system, last Tuesday, stopping in both Norton and Goodland.

"People tell you about things," she said, "but there's no comparison to seeing them."

Ms. Miller, who was appointed by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius in January, said she is trying to visit all six districts, looking at the work being done and talking to people in the areas, taxpayers and highway employees.

Besides her visit to Norton, she was the speaker for a Rotary Club meeting in Colby and met with editors of Nor'West Newspapers afterward. She went to Norton to inspect the airport and meet with department employees, then headed for Salina. The next day, she had an appointment to speak at a luncheon in Manhattan.

Earlier in the day, Ms. Miller fielded questions on the state highway fund, the problems her department is having with money and why all the roads around Colby are under construction.

"As awful as construction is," she said, "improvements are really wonderful."

Ms. Miller said that when she started working for the transportation department in the early 1980s, the state highway system had fallen into disrepair. Not enough money had been spent on the roads and things were headed downhill. The Department of Transportation did not have a good reputation, she said.

Projects were promised but never delivered, and who got what sometimes was determined by political pull rather than need. There was also a contractor bid-rigging scandal which gave the department a black eye.

However, in 1985, the state instituted a priority formula for projects. Every project was weighed by the formula. Then in 1989, the Legislature passed the eight-year Comprehensive Highway Program and Kansas was on its way to rebuilding its roads.

She said analysts have said that the road-building program enabled Kansas to weather the recession that hit in the '90s better than most states.

In 1999, the Legislature passed the Comprehensive Transportation Program, a 10-year plan which added airports and short-line rail-

roads to the package.

Since then, however, the Legislature has cut money out of the transportation budget by keeping sales tax revenues from the general funds. It increased the gasoline tax and vehicle registration fees to make up for that, she said.

Still the department has suffered cuts in the last four legislative sessions and last year had to absorb the expenses of the Highway Patrol along with getting less money.

Still since most of the department's money comes from fees and federal money, Ms. Miller said, it should be OK and would be able to finish out its promised projects in the 10 years allotted.

If, however, if any more cuts are made in the budget, she said, they would not be able to finish all the projects. Ms. Miller said she would consider extending the program by two years to avoid that, but she's not a fan of extension because all the projects were picked in 1999. By 2009, there will be a lot of new things that need doing, and extending the program will just put them off longer.

However, she said, it would be better to extend than cut. Once a project is promised, it must be delivered, she said. Many parts of the state are still angry because free-ways promised in the 1980s have never been built.

The No. 1 priority for her department is maintenance, she said. Although enhancements are good, maintenance is essential.

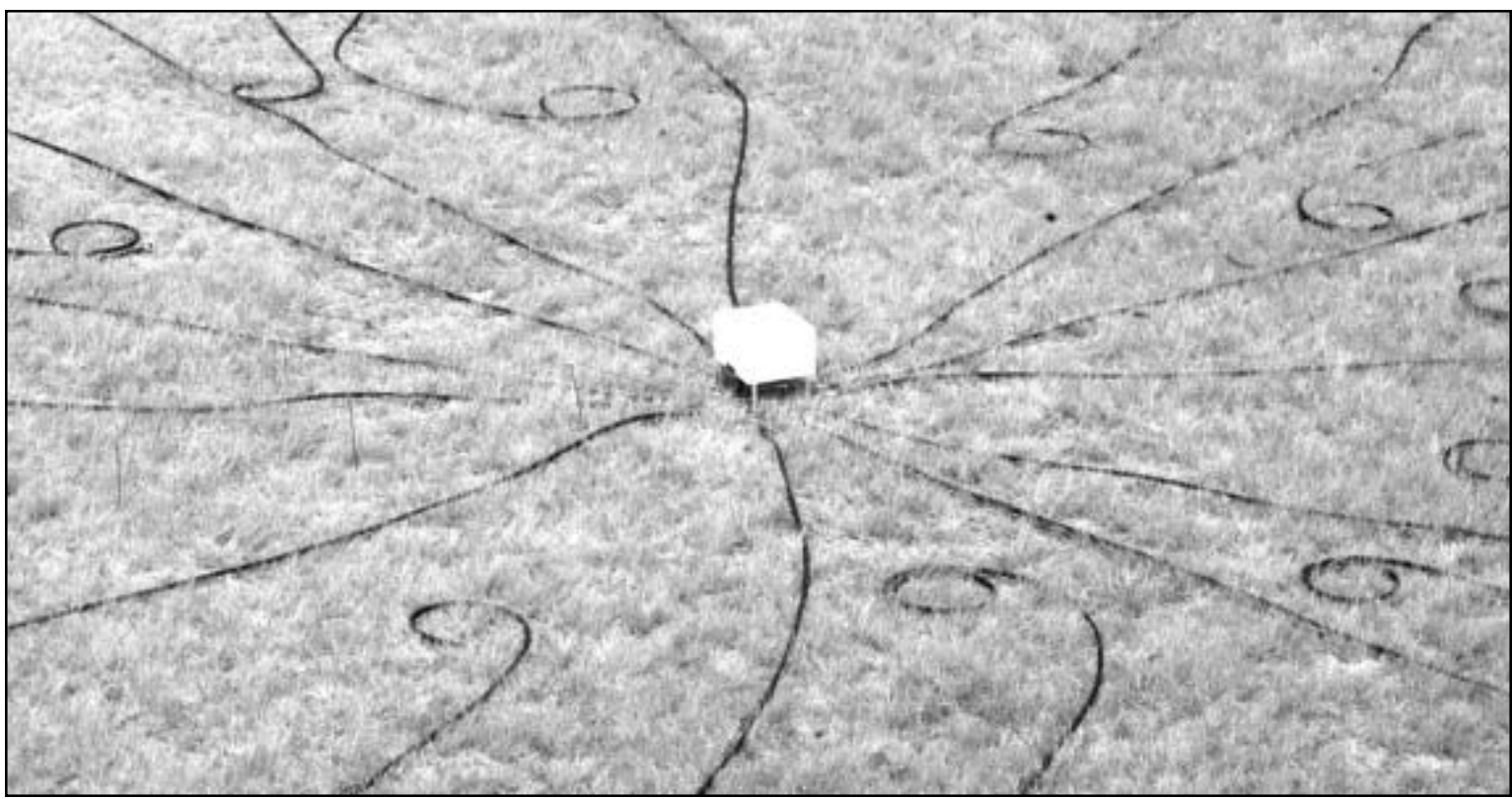
"Our pavement is good, but in three, four or five years with no maintenance, roads can go downhill," she said. "Even in tight times, it's shortsighted to not do maintenance."

The state has set aside \$3 million a year to help communities repair airports and \$3 million a year to help short-line railroads update and maintain their tracks.

"Airports are not a luxury," Ms. Miller said. "They're a necessity for air ambulances and business in rural areas."

"I think we're getting some pretty good projects (airport work) across the state."

She also said that she was pleased with the success of the short-line railroad projects, which have helped railroads move a lot of wheat this harvest season. The railroads can move the grain cheaper than trucks can, she said, and that keeps the traffic off the highways.



The National Weather Service in Goodland has an experimental device that listens for tornadoes by detecting subaudible sound. Nicknamed "the Octopus," it is set up in the grassy field

behind the building. The black soaker hoses spread around the detection box gave the device its name.

— Staff photo by Shannon Davidson

This octopus built to detect tornadoes

By SHANNON DAVIDSON
The Goodland Star-News

There's an octopus sitting outside of Goodland, listening for tornadoes.

Really. The Environmental Technology Laboratory of Boulder, Colo., developed the Octopus, an infrasonic device designed for detection of tornadoes. The experimental device detects sounds that are subaudible, too low for humans to hear.

Humans can hear down to about 20 hertz and the device is designed to pick up sounds at about half that wavelength, down to 10 hertz.

The Octopus is made up of four sets of sensors surrounded by soaker hoses, each about 50 feet long, arrayed in a field around the

Goodland weather station.

"Recent research indicates that strong, rotating thunderstorms generate low-frequency sound waves, and sometimes these sound waves appear tens of minutes before tornado development," says a note on the Goodland National Weather Service web site.

Bruce Entwistle of the National Weather Service Forecast Office explained what the Octopus is made of and its capabilities.

"The soaker hoses are used to measure very subtle pressure changes, the thickness of a sheet of paper," he said. "They work as a low frequency ear drum. They are spread out in order to detect from what direction the infrasounds are coming. This arrangement gives the de-

vice its octopus-like appearance.

Similar units have been installed in Pueblo, Colo., and in Boulder.

"The Octopus will be used in conjunction with radar to better detect the presence of tornadoes," Entwistle said. "The Octopus will be in Goodland as a trial process. It was installed June 18 and it will be here at least through the summer and until thunderstorm season is done."

The infrasonic detection devices in Goodland and Pueblo are monitored in Boulder by the environmental technology lab, though forecasters here also can access the data. If the people in Boulder detect something, Entwistle said, they'll call the Goodland office.

The trial will determine if in the future forecasters will be able to use

the technology to help spot tornadoes and funnel clouds.

"Local weather service people have not had an opportunity to get to know the device," Entwistle said, "but if the trial process goes well, the Octopus will be used to incorporate sound data for real-time warnings in addition to radar."

"So far, the Octopus has detected a couple of signals and reports of possible funnel clouds. Goodland is still waiting on fences to go around the set of four sensors to help manage the high wind speeds around the device."

By providing detection capabilities where radar can't look, such as obstacles blocking the radar, the Octopus is designed to help reduce blind spots, the Boulder lab says.

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Board considers policy on home-schooled kids

The Oberlin School Board had a first reading last Tuesday for a home schooling policy recommended by Superintendent Kelly Glodt.

A home school parent asked Mr. Glodt last year if a home school student could attend some classes like band or gym at the school. The district did not have a policy and the board asked him to look into it.

The proposed policy states that students enrolled in home schools in the district may petition the district to participate in any courses. The district has the right to allow the student to attend or not.

If the student attends any classes, he or she must follow the district's rules and pay any fees that apply.

Board President Chris Bailey said he thought the policy review committee needed to look at the proposal before approving it.

Mr. Glodt said he realized that he didn't follow the usual procedure but thought that with kids getting enrolled, parents may want to know if home school students can attend classes.

Board Member DeWayne Jackson said that this meeting could be considered the first reading of the policy.

That way, if the committee reviews the policy, the second reading can be done in the first meeting in August, and if the board wants to approve it, they can.

Stockton native to be honored

Lorenzo Fuller Jr., 84, an African-American musical prodigy who became a television pioneer in New York, is returning to his hometown of Stockton on Thursday.

A tribute in his honor is planned in Stockton's renovated Nova Theatre, 517 Main St., at 8 p.m. A reception will precede the program at 7 p.m.

Mr. Fuller graduated from the University of Kansas in 1941 with a degree in music and went on to attend the Juilliard School in New York. He remained in New York to embark on a career that included performing on Broadway, on national radio and on early television. He was the host of a 15-minute 1947 NBC musical show and became the first black in the nation to have his own television show, "Musical Miniatures," preceding Nat King Cole's show a few years later.

He is returning to his Kansas hometown at the request of a television producer and biographer, Angela Logan of Teaneck, N.J. The July 24 tribute to Fuller is a fundraising event to help her produce a documentary, "Lorenzo Fuller: Black Pioneer in Early Television."

She says his contributions to television have been largely overlooked. Her proposal to document his career in video won her acceptance at the Sundance Producers Conference during summer 2002.

Smoky Hills Public Television will film parts of the tribute for the documentary, which will explore Mr. Fuller's life and career of making history in Kansas, in the broadcast industry and among African-Americans.

She said she selected July 24 for the tribute to coincide with the annual emancipation celebration of Nicodemus, a frontier black settlement in Graham County, about 20 miles west of Stockton on the Solomon River.

"Mr. Fuller's mother used to march in the annual parade at Nicodemus," Ms. Logan said.

For details, contact Angela Logan, (201) 921-3833; Roger Hrabe, Rooks County Economic Development Council, (785) 425-6881; Twila Sanders, Stockton Chamber of Commerce, (785) 425-6556; Nova Theatre, (785) 425-6759; or Tim McQuade, Smoky Hills Public Television, (785) 483-6990.

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