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TO: Steve Ehlmann, St. Charles County Executive
St. Charles County Councilors

FROM: Ralph Pfremer, Trailnet Executive Director 

RE: Recent County action concerning Main Street in O'Fallon

DATE: September 29, 2015

Earlier this year, as part of a planning study for the Highway K, Main St. and Highway M corridor, the City of O'Fallon did something important: it asked residents to help develop a vision for a revitalized downtown Main Street. In a series of focus group meetings, surveys, individual interviews and public workshops the people of O'Fallon spoke loud and clear. More than half believe the four-lane Main Street thoroughfare is declining; 82% said they do not take visitors there. Words commonly used by participants to describe Main Street included "old," "outdated" and "ugly." They said Main Street needs a greater variety of businesses to draw residents and visitors; that the streetscape, aesthetics, functionality and walkability of Main Street all need to be improved.

Increasingly local governments in this region and around the country are hearing what O'Fallon heard from its residents: the public desires better main streets with balanced traffic flows, improved aesthetics, and new businesses that attract more customers and provide a great destination. There are numerous examples of local governments making changes to revitalize their main streets by working with residents and the private sector. Some of those changes involve a "road diet" to take four-lane streets to three lanes. Road diets have been used throughout the country to reduce crashes and make streets more welcoming for businesses and residents, without changing congestion for people driving.

Kirkwood Road is a great local example of a road-diet that supports a thriving downtown. Like O'Fallon, Kirkwood's main street is part of a busy state road that the city owns and maintains. Kirkwood's redevelopment has made its downtown area a thriving center of the community, and an economic development success.

The rewards of a main street built to suit the needs of a community are both intangible - like community pride - as well as tangible, like increased property values, new businesses and jobs, and more sales tax revenue. So why would St. Charles County take an action that impedes O'Fallon's options for its Main Street redevelopment?

As reported in the Post-Dispatch (9/16/15), the County recently voted to place an unusual road funding condition on the City of O'Fallon. In short: O'Fallon must pass a resolution pledging to keep four lanes on Main Street or lose \$2.5 million in county sales tax funding to improve two other roads (Sonderen Blvd. and Eggering Drive).

County Executive Ehlmann attempted to justify this funding condition in a September 21st memo to mayors and administrators in St. Charles County. His main rationale is that the

County will not provide funding for a local project that increases capacity on one road if that same jurisdiction may also reduce capacity on another road.

This is a very troubling precedent. By requiring this condition, the County is interfering with O'Fallon's right to determine the design on a road it owns and pays to maintain. Will St. Charles County now use the purse strings of road funds to ensure no lane reductions are contemplated or implemented by all its cities? I respectfully submit to you that this action with O'Fallon, and any similar actions the County may consider taking in the future, are both overreaching and short-sighted. I urge the County to reconsider this matter.

cc: Mayor William Hennesey
O'Fallon City Council