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K.C. metropolitan area transit plan sent to governor

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The Legislature in its final week sent a bill to the governor that would allow Buchanan County to join a Kansas City metropolitan area transit plan.

Assuming the bill is signed into law by the governor, voters in the region could approve a sales tax to pay for expanded bus service and potentially a rail line.

Originally, the bill included only Jackson, Cass, Ray, Clay and Platte counties, but Sen. Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, asked that Buchanan County be added as well, since many people commute to Kansas City, and vice-versa.

The Smart Moves transit plan would allow for a half-cent sales tax that would generate about \$124 million a year for 15 years. County officials would have to choose to be part of the plan and to put the measure on the ballot.

The plan was supposed to include Wyandotte, Johnson and Leavenworth counties in Kansas, but a similar authorizing bill died in the Kansas Legislature.

Bonuses for losing land

Missouri citizens gained new protections this year from the state's power to seize land, but they might also get pricier highways in the bargain.

Kevin Keith, the Missouri Department of Transportation's chief engineer, said last week that the eminent domain bill passed by the Legislature could make it more expensive to acquire land. That's because the bill offers bonuses of 25 percent to home or business owners who are losing their primary residence or place of business, and bonuses of 50 percent to property owners who have held their land for 50 years or longer.

MoDOT only uses eminent domain in 6 percent or 7 percent of cases, Mr. Keith said. But he noted that MoDOT will have to offer similar bonuses for outright sales to prevent more land acquisitions from winding up in court.

Mr. Keith said there were no estimates of how much the proposed law, which has not yet been signed by the governor, would cost MoDOT, or what affect it would have on future highway projects.

Steele to be appointed

Gov. Matt Blunt plans to appoint Rebecca R. Steele, 51, of Chillicothe, Mo., to the state's Health Education Centers Council. Ms. Steele sits on the Northwest Missouri Workforce Investment Board with North Central Missouri College. Her appointment is subject to Senate confirmation. However, the Senate didn't have time to confirm her before the session ended Friday and will deal with the matter in September.

Schaaf gets new office

Rep. Dr. Rob Schaaf, R-St. Joseph, managed to score a new office in the final week of session. When former Rep. Scott Rupp was installed last Monday as the Missouri Senate's newest member, his office on the third floor of the Capitol opened up.

Dr. Schaaf's previous office was on the first floor — a significant distance when one is trying to get to the House chamber in time to vote. Dr. Schaaf noted that his new office is a mere 43 steps away from his desk on the floor.

Dr. Schaaf's new office is located in Room 304-B.

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