

## Autonomous Vehicles in Work Zones

At the end of April 2017, the Missouri Department of Transportation will be issuing a Request for Proposal to test the use of autonomous vehicles in striping operations. The vehicles would be placed at the rear of striping chains and equipped with attenuators.

### Communications Planning

The autonomous vehicle testing will be overseen by district personnel, but headquarters communicators drafted the initial communications plan and materials, including internal and external talking points, a press release, social media posts and an article for MoDOT's external e-newsletter, ExpressLane.

Because of the cutting-edge nature of the project, national media outreach was also included in the communications plan. This will involve contacting editors of *Government Technology* and several other similar publications and doing an old-fashioned "story pitch."

The plan was drafted from a single teleconference with the district project lead and a review of the RFP. The multidisciplinary team overseeing the project reviewed the plan, made minor changes in terminology and emphasis, and approved it.

From that point, district communications personal took over outreach and media response since their employees would be working on the test.

### Organization Integration

Several departments formed the multidisciplinary team including Maintenance, Communications, Innovations, Risk and Benefits, General Services and the Chief Counsel's Office. Issues with MoDOT's legal right to pursue this effort were explored along with several other logistical matters.

MoDOT recently supported a legislative effort regarding the "platooning" of trucks on Missouri highways which was vetoed by the former governor. There were concerns the two efforts would be confused, although they were not related in scope, technological-means or execution.

Due to political sensitivity, Governmental Relations asked that the RFP not be released until later in the legislative session.

### Communication Implementation

A communications plan and deliverables were created several weeks before the release of the RFP. A press release, "e update" and social media posts will launch the day the RFP goes out.

Communications materials focused on improved safety in work zones. Other topics address the technology itself and MoDOT's statutory ability to pursue the project under certain guidelines. Media contact is the team leader.

