



A Greater Gravois May Be a Local Gravois

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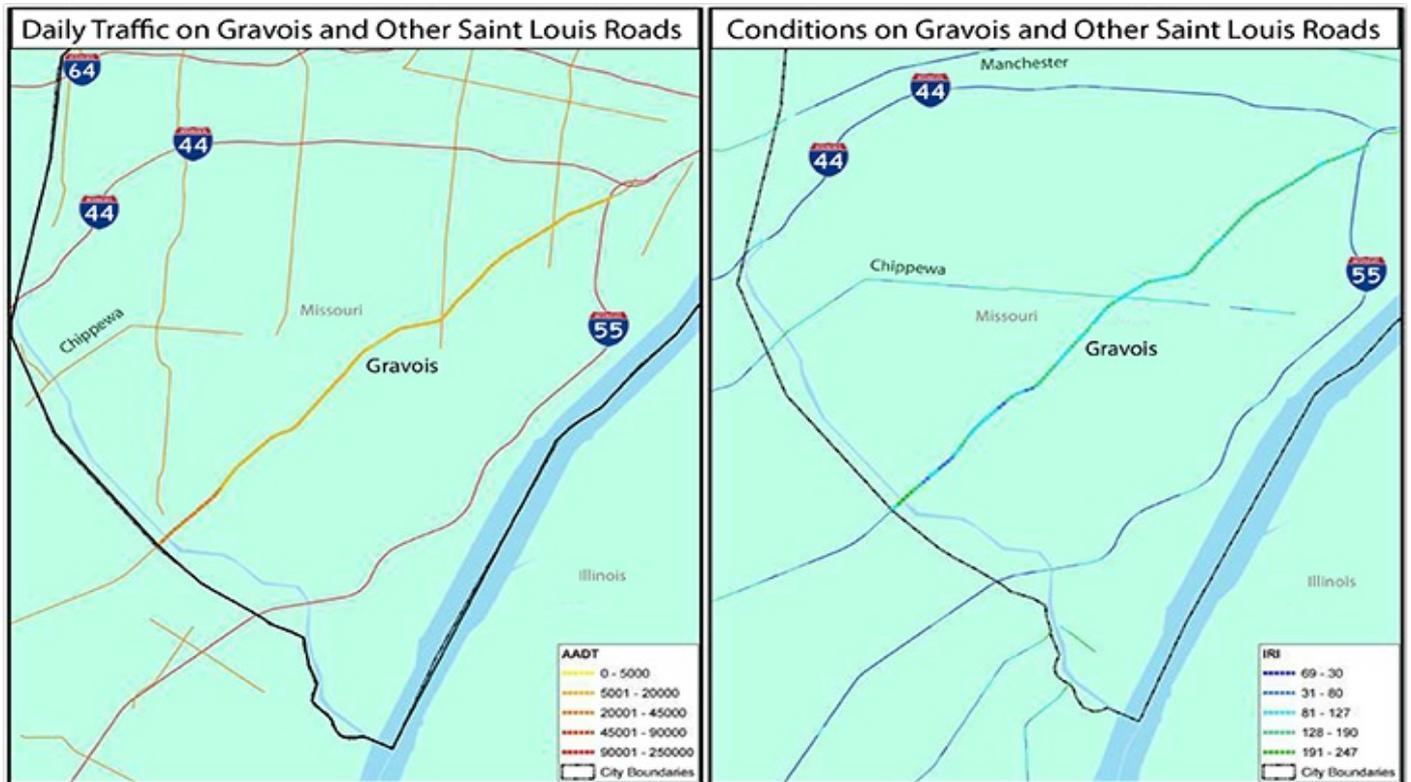
By: Joseph Miller

In recent years, the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) has faced [growing criticism](#) about the maintenance of Gravois Road (Missouri Route 30) in St. Louis City. Complaints range from traffic speeds to road quality to bicycle facilities. A citizen group called [Greater Gravois Initiative](#) would like to transform the highway altogether, adding traffic circles, bike lanes, and better transit, in a bid to create more urban development in the area. However, given MoDOT's differing priorities and limited means, if the city truly wants to transform the area it might consider taking *back* control of Gravois.

Until 2004, Saint Louis City, and not MoDOT, controlled Gravois Road. The city declined to turn Gravois and other arterial roads over to the state in the 1950s, but by the early 2000s city leaders argued it was unfair that Saint Louis City was the only county that did not [receive state support for non-interstate highways](#). Turning Gravois (along with five other highways) over to the state was billed as a matter of fairness and cost savings for the city.

But MoDOT doesn't have significant resources to spend on Gravois. And what money it does have is [usually restricted](#), by law, to highway improvements (meaning that bike lanes, public transit upgrades, and other street beautification are excluded). Furthermore, MoDOT has to [consider congestion and roadway quality](#), not just the aesthetic appeal of areas along Gravois. After all, it is the state transportation department, not an urban development office. And as things stand, Gravois Road is one of the busiest non-interstate roads in Saint Louis, with poor

pavement conditions along much of the roadway, as shown in the maps below. (AADT refers to average annual daily traffic in the map on the left; in the map on the right, IRI refers to the International Roughness Index, a measure of road quality.)



Instead of criticizing MoDOT for failing to spend money it does not have on slowing down a state highway, Saint Louis City should consider taking Gravois back from state control. That would give residents the freedom to transform the road as they see fit, if the city or citizens along Gravois are willing to pay for such improvements. It would also reduce MoDOT's responsibilities, a useful precedent for a department in control of many highways (which it can't afford to maintain) that [would be local or county roads in other states](#) .

About the Author



*Joseph Miller
Policy Analyst*

Joseph Miller was a policy analyst at the Show-Me Institute. He focused on infrastructure, transportation, and municipal issues. He grew up in Itasca, Ill., and earned an undergraduate degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and a master's degree from the University of California-San Diego's School of International Relations and Pacific Studies.

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Show-Me Institute

5297 Washington Place	3645 Troost Avenue
Saint Louis, MO 63108	Kansas City, MO 64109
Phone: (314) 454-0647	Phone: (816) 287-0370
Fax: (314) 454-0667	

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