

# **INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION**

## **Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 2025 Interim**

**November 4, 2025**

### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

The sixth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Transportation was held on November 4, 2025, at 1:00 PM in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Jimmy Higdon, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

### **Present were:**

Members: Senator Jimmy Higdon, Co-Chair; Representative John Blanton, Co-Chair; Senators Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Karen Berg, Donald Douglas, Greg Elkins, Brandon Smith, Brandon J. Storm, Phillip Wheeler, Gex Williams, and Mike Wilson; and Representatives Ryan Bivens, Josh Branscum, Randy Bridges, Anne Gay Donworth, Myron Dossett, Daniel Elliott, David Hale, Samara Heavrin, John Hodgson, Thomas Huff, Mary Beth Imes, Matthew Lehman, Derek Lewis, Amy Neighbors, Rachel Roarx, Tom Smith, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Walker Thomas, and Ken Upchurch.

Guests: Alyssa Burns, Mother of Camberleigh Burns, Justice for Camberleigh Campaign; Major Eric Walker, Director of Division of East Troops, Kentucky State Police (KSP); John Moore, Deputy State Highway Engineer, Department of Highways, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC); Jason Siwula, Deputy State Highway Engineer, Department of Highways, KYTC; Captain Chris Baker, Driver's Testing Branch, KSP; and Matthew Cole, Commissioner, Department of Vehicle Regulation, KYTC.

LRC Staff: Dana Fugazzi, Ashley Nash, and Christina Williams.

### **Introduction of Special Guests**

Co-Chair Blanton welcomed the leadership class from the Kentucky Petroleum Manufacturer Marketing Association.

Chair Higdon recognized and thanked all veterans for their service as Veteran's Day is on November 11th.

Representative Hale introduced the Circuit Court Clerk from Montgomery County, Tanya Terry.

### **Approval of the October 14, 2025, minutes**

Representative Upchurch made a motion to approve the October 14, 2025, meeting

Committee meeting materials may be accessed online at <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/CommitteeDocuments/34>

minutes. Representative Bivens seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

### **Discussion on Hands Free Legislation (2026 RS BR 238)**

Chair Higdon briefed the committee on his sponsored legislation, 2026 RS BR 238. The bill would make it unlawful to hold or support, with any part of your body, a mobile electronic device while operating a motor vehicle on a public highway; and would prohibit a person from reading, composing, or transmitting text messages or watching any moving images. Chair Higdon explained the bill's limited exemptions, and rules law enforcement would be required to follow when enforcing the law. The fine for a violation of this statute would be \$100 plus court costs.

Appearing with Chair Higdon was Alyssa Burns, Mother of Camberleigh Burns, who tragically passed away in a car accident due to a distracted driver. Ms. Burns shared Camberleigh's story and advocated for passage of the bill.

Co-Chair Blanton expressed condolences to Ms. Burns and stressed the importance of highway safety and his support for the legislation.

Senator Smith praised Chair Higdon on his advocacy and work on the legislation and expressed his support in the name of Marshae Nicole Neace, a young lady that was also tragically killed by a distracted driver. Senator Smith suggested adding community service to the bill as recompense.

In response to Representative Donworth, Chair Higdon stated the bill would apply to all public roads. She expressed concern with the difficulty for law enforcement.

In response to Representative Hodgson, Chair Higdon stated initiating a call with the touch of a button would not be considered a violation.

In response to Representative Lehman, Chair Higdon stated this would not be a violation where points are assessed to a person's license, and that he modeled the legislation after the seat belt law with a prepayable fine. Representative Lehman encouraged studying the link between this violation and texting while driving, which does carry a points assessment on licenses.

Senator Williams suggested amending the bill to include restrictions on operating a device that needs a password to unlock.

Representative Roarx expressed her support for the bill and the importance of the committee to set behavior standards for citizens and to promote behavior change as previously accomplished with the seat belt and work zone safety laws. In response to

Representative Roarx, Chair Higdon stated the bill does not increase penalties for causing a fatality while using a mobile electronic device.

### **Automated Enforcement in Work Zones Implementation**

Co-Chair Blanton; Major Eric Walker, Director of Division of East Troops, KSP; John Moore, Deputy State Highway Engineer, Department of Highways, KYTC; and Jason Siwula, Deputy State Highway Engineer, Department of Highways, KYTC, briefed the committee on the implementation of 2025 RS HB 664, The Jared Lee Helton Act, automated enforcement in work zones. HB 664's goals were to improve work zone safety, enforce work zone speed limits, have safer enforcement beyond the work zone, save lives, and prevent injuries. The legislation combined cameras with on-scene law enforcement to issuing citations in real time.

The camera roll out plan includes a small initial deployment of five locations. The current deployments are in Shelby County on I-64, Laurel and Whitley County on I-75, Martin County on KY-3, and Fayette County on KY 4-18. The plan includes reviewing any impact, further developing policy, and expanding camera locations in 2026. Co-Chair Blanton stated the enforcement has already proven to be impactful.

In response to Representative Roarx, Mr. Moore stated the intent is to place signage at each approach to the work zone.

Senator Storm recognized Officer Steven Douglas, Public Affairs Officer, Commercial Vehicle Enforcement, KSP, for posting photographs on his social media accounts to raise awareness.

Representative Donworth stated she passes two of the deployment locations regularly and they are very well marked.

### **Driver's License Reports on Regional Offices and Testing**

Matthew Cole, Commissioner, Department of Vehicle Regulation, KYTC; and Captain Chris Baker, Driver's Testing Branch, KSP, gave an update on the 35 driver's license regional offices and testing.

Commissioner Cole stated KYTC continues to work closely with KSP to constantly reevaluate regional office capacity to support KSPs testing workload. Several "driver testing only" Saturdays have been conducted to help reduce any backlog; wait times have been cut by more than half since the spring through increased staffing, additional appointments, and line queue management improvements; the average walk-in wait time was reduced from 49 minutes in April to 25 minutes in August; and the average appointment wait time improved from 25 minutes in April to 15 minutes by August.

Captain Baker stated in 2024, KSP gave 194,216 written tests, 147,460 of which were class D operator standard license tests. As of October 30th, a total of 186,990 written tests were given in 2025, of which 150,840 were class D operator standard license tests. There was a slight decline on the skills test, but he believed there would be an increase due to 2025 RS HB 15, which reduced the permit driving age to 15.

Captain Baker provided an update on the pilot program where skills tests are given in counties without a regional licensing office, which began in September 2024 and allows residents of those five counties under the age of 18 to take a skills test for an intermediate license in that county.

Representative Bivens reiterated many people are not happy with the switch to regional driver testing centers, and the increase in tests should level out as the initial wave of 15-year-olds get their permits. In response to Representative Bivens, Commissioner Cole stated there is a weekly training for all regional office employees and continuous evaluations are done between offices. He added higher performing offices success stories are shared with underperforming offices. People from the higher performing offices also help with the offices that need more training.

In response to Senator Douglas, Captain Baker stated the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) has skills testing standards that they follow. He believes it was last updated in late 2022 or early 2023.

In response to Chair Higdon, Commissioner Cole stated a location has not yet been established for the regional office in Oldham County.

In response to Representative Smith, Commissioner Cole stated the investigation continues into employee fraud in the issuance of licenses. Representative Smith called attention to the ongoing challenge of skills testing in his area of the state.

### **KYTC's Property Procurement Process and Eminent Domain**

Mr. Siwula briefed the committee on transportation rights-of-way and eminent domain. A right-of-way is the land that a transportation facility occupies, or is owned by the operating agency, or that the operating agency has a right to use for roadway purposes. The rights required to support a roadway must include sufficient interest to provide for both the construction and continued maintenance of the facility. Mr. Siwula touched on right-of-way laws, regulations, and policies; the right-of-way guidance manual; the appraisal guidelines manual; the relocation assistance manual; and the methods by which KYTC transfers ownership of property. Mr. Siwula stressed how crucial acquisition of transportation right-of-way is to the function of KYTC to build, expand, and maintain transportation facilities.

In response to Chair Higdon, Mr. Siwula stated more steps that can be taken, including mediation.

Representative Bivens discussed the challenges and hardships associated with eminent domain, noting one instance highlighted at a recent Agriculture Committee meeting.

Representative Donworth encouraged all committee members to watch the referenced Agriculture Committee meeting, adding that the issue seemed like a staffing or administrative regulation issue. However, it is imperative that people are treated fairly. In response, Mr. Siwula stated there are checks and balances in place, and appraisals can be done by external certified appraisers. Non-complex appraisals are sometimes done internally, and reviewed by a third party not involved with the project. The appraiser cannot be the person that makes the offer, and the person that makes the offer cannot deliver the payment. Representative Donworth encouraged the cabinet to not only work with property owners to buy the land, but to replace infrastructure moved or changed as a result of the acquisition. Mr. Siwula stated if a property is damaged, that is considered in the appraisal and is compensable under certain regulations and guidelines.

Senator Williams stated the eminent domain system was established so roads would not rely primarily on tolls. In response, Mr. Siwula stated every road project is unique. Depending on the project, where it needs to go, and what the valuations are, there are projects that have right-of-way costs that exceed the construction cost. However, those are rare.

In response to Representative Tackett Laferty, Mr. Siwula stated after an offer is made and the property owner has the opportunity to talk to the right-of-way agent, and once a condemnation action is filed if necessary due to lack of agreement, they continue through the process and have further discussions with the property owner. He stated discussions can involve altering the project to lessen impacts on the property or compensation alterations. However, after the condemnation process is started, there is still an ability to have discussions. He added there is no mediation process where all parties are brought to the table before condemnation is filed, but KYTC does everything they can to reach an agreement before condemnation.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the committee, Chair Higdon adjourned the meeting at 2:45 PM.