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- Provided by SPiRiT

Nov. 7 was the start of the 18th annual SPiRiT Conference at the Riney Conference Center at the Pratt Community College.

The event kicked off with at an evening reception, and the next morning, about 60 people from all four states – Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico – heard welcomes from Pratt Mayor Jeff Taylor, Pratt County Commissioner Glenna Borho and Kansas District 33 Senator Mitch Holmes.

Jack Taylor, executive director of SPiRiT (Southwest Passage Initiative for Regional and Interstate Transportation) gave a brief history of SPiRiT and its mission, followed by a video address from U.S. Senator Pat Roberts.



Kansas Department of Transportation Deputy Secretary Jerry Younger made a presentation about how KDOT projects are funded, what the money is allocated for and how new construction projects are selected.

He explained about KDOT's efforts to included all the communities and surrounding areas in the

decisions based on priorities. He also talked about the projects which are “shovel ready” in case additional funds become available.

U.S. Senator Jerry Moran gave a welcome by video from his office in Washington. Then there was a panel presentation and discussion by four state DOT engineers on progress made in their respective states and future construction plans for upgrading U.S. Highway 54.

Tom Church, New Mexico Secretary of Transportation; Jerry Younger, KDOT Deputy Secretary; Ron McDaniel, Oklahoma DOT Division Engineer and Ron Johnston, Texas, represented their individual states well by relaying plenty of information and answering many questions.

Scott Mullen, KDOT Area Engineer, gave a power point presentation about the two construction projects on U.S. Highway 54 between Kingman and Pratt.

This should be completed by mid-2014, providing travelers with safer and more efficient driving on 23 miles of new four-lane highway.

The “Relief Route” project going around the north of Kingman is ready for the next step of construction as soon as funds become available. This was followed by a welcome and congratulation video presentation by former Kansas Governor Bill Graves, who is now the president and CEO of the American Truckers Association.

Economic development, tourism, new business and safety were discussed by the final panel made up of Linda Lanterman with KDWPT; Allan Luttrell with EBH Engineering; Jeff Blubaugh, who is a Wichita city councilman and Doug Donaghue with Pratt Energy.

This gave all the attendees a new perspective to the urgency to add more four lanes to U.S. Highway 54. Jack Thimesch, Kansas District 114 Representative, presented some new thoughts about the need to keep in touch with our state and federal legislators reminding them of our needs on this High Priority Corridor on the Federal Highway System.

Dave Howard, City Manager of Pratt, gave a talk about how pleased they are about the new construction bringing the four lanes to their city and how it will help with economic development along the route. He urged everyone to continue to support SPiRiT.

This terrific conference is the result of a great committee made up of Pratt people who worked so hard to make everyone proud they came to Pratt for the conference. They were Diana Garten, city finance director, Bruce Pinkall, recreation director, Jan Scarbrough, chamber of commerce director, all encouraged and led by Howard.

Dennis McKinney from Greensburg was one of the best master of ceremonies ever. He was so knowledgeable about U.S. Highway 54 and so comfortable with all the people since he is a former Kansas state treasurer and formerly served as Kansas state representative for nine terms.

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