Midwest DOTs Reach Design Milestone
For System to Find Truck Parking Spots

By Eugene Mulero
Staff Reporter

Development of a regional notification system to assist thousands of truckers in finding parking spots during their routes across the upper Midwest is closer to becoming a reality.

Managers of this truck parking information system, which is meant to alert truckers of available parking in eight states, approved a preliminary design plan last month. The plan consisted of design layouts for road signs as well as smartphone applications, Davonna Moore, assistant bureau chief of transportation planning with the Kansas Department of Transportation and the project’s lead coordinator, told TRANSPORT TOPICS on Oct. 18.

Moore said the states will approve a final design for the system by mid-2017. The system's launch is scheduled for September 2018.

“As a public entity, sometimes we’re not seen as being helpful to the private sector, but for us, it’s all about transportation and moving goods, which is one of our key components as a DOT,” Moore said. “Any way we can help out with that and also keeping our drivers safe, and that includes our truck drivers, I think this is a good position for the DOT to be in.”

As they continue to gather feedback from stakeholders about the system’s design, the idea for the system originated with DOT officials in Kansas, along with those in Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, who expressed concerns about the lack of parking along interstate 35, 64, 65, 70, 71, 75, 80 and 94.

“Once a truck driver sees a sign, they’ll see information about the rest area or private site, and they may also see information about the next two sites that may be 40 or 50 miles down the road, giving them enough time to make a decision about where they can park, and giving them confidence about where they can park,” Moore added.

After sounding the alarm on the need for parking, Kansas DOT sought backing from federal transportation officials to finance a regional alert system. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Transportation responded and awarded Kansas and the seven other states a $25 million grant, which was part of the department’s Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program. The states are chipping in a total $3.6 million.

Project managers also are working with the American Transportation Research Institute and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association to survey truckers about parking concerns in the region.

Parking ranked fourth on ATRI’s 2016 roundup of the top 10 issues confronting the trucking industry. According to ATRI’s analysis, “The growing scarcity of available truck parking creates a dangerous situation for truck drivers who are often forced to drive beyond allowable [hours-of-service] rules or park in undesignated and, in many cases, unsafe locations.”

In the analysis, ATRI added that budget shortfalls in myriad states contributed to closing truck stops and rest areas along many freight corridors.