

HOUSE Transportation
Rep. Dan Ruby, Chairman
SB 2062 -- OPPOSED

CHAIRMAN RUBY AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Cecile Wehrman. I represent the North Dakota Newspaper association and the state's 73 newspapers. We oppose adoption of Senate Bill 2062.

This bill has been proposed primarily on the basis of other bidding platforms being available vs. the cost of publication in newspapers. That leaves out what we believe is the most important reason for these publications: The public's right to know.

The Department of Transportation seeks to cut official county newspapers from the requirement to publish requests for bids for construction but that also cuts the knowledge the general public has about projects coming to their local area, not to mention, how their taxpayer dollars may soon be spent.

One of the beauties of public notice is how many times a reader finds something they never knew they were interested in until a notice appears in their hometown paper. Even though the average citizen may have no intention of bidding, they have a right to know that bids are being sought, the scope of work to be covered, as well as the heads up that travel or commerce may be impacted by an upcoming project.

Furthermore, we know people cannot monitor state websites on a continual basis in search of information that may impact them locally. That's why they rely on newspapers.

The notion there is no cost associated with alternate dissemination methods is false. Labor in updating information, maintaining electronic infrastructure such as websites, and subscriptions to other platforms also costs money. However, newspapers already provide a FREE place where people can search by city or county for all public notices and we are required by law to post them there. Do a Google search for North Dakota Public Notices and you'll find we're the top result. The website is called ndpublicnotices.com.

The cost of publication of these projects in newspapers amounts to a minute fraction of total project cost compared to the millions spent on even the most basic highway construction. It's a very small price to pay for notice to the people ultimately footing the bill -- the tax payer.

In a recent survey, 8 out of 10 North Dakotans named newspapers as the preferred method for receiving public notice, over government websites. On behalf of North Dakota's newspapers and their 300,000 readers, we urge a DO NOT PASS on SB 2062.

Thank you for your consideration.

