



Testimony Regarding HB 1148

House Agriculture Committee

January 20, 2023

Prepared by: Dana G. Larsen, PE, Ward County Engineer

RE: Support for HB 1148 – Relating to road and bridge funding.

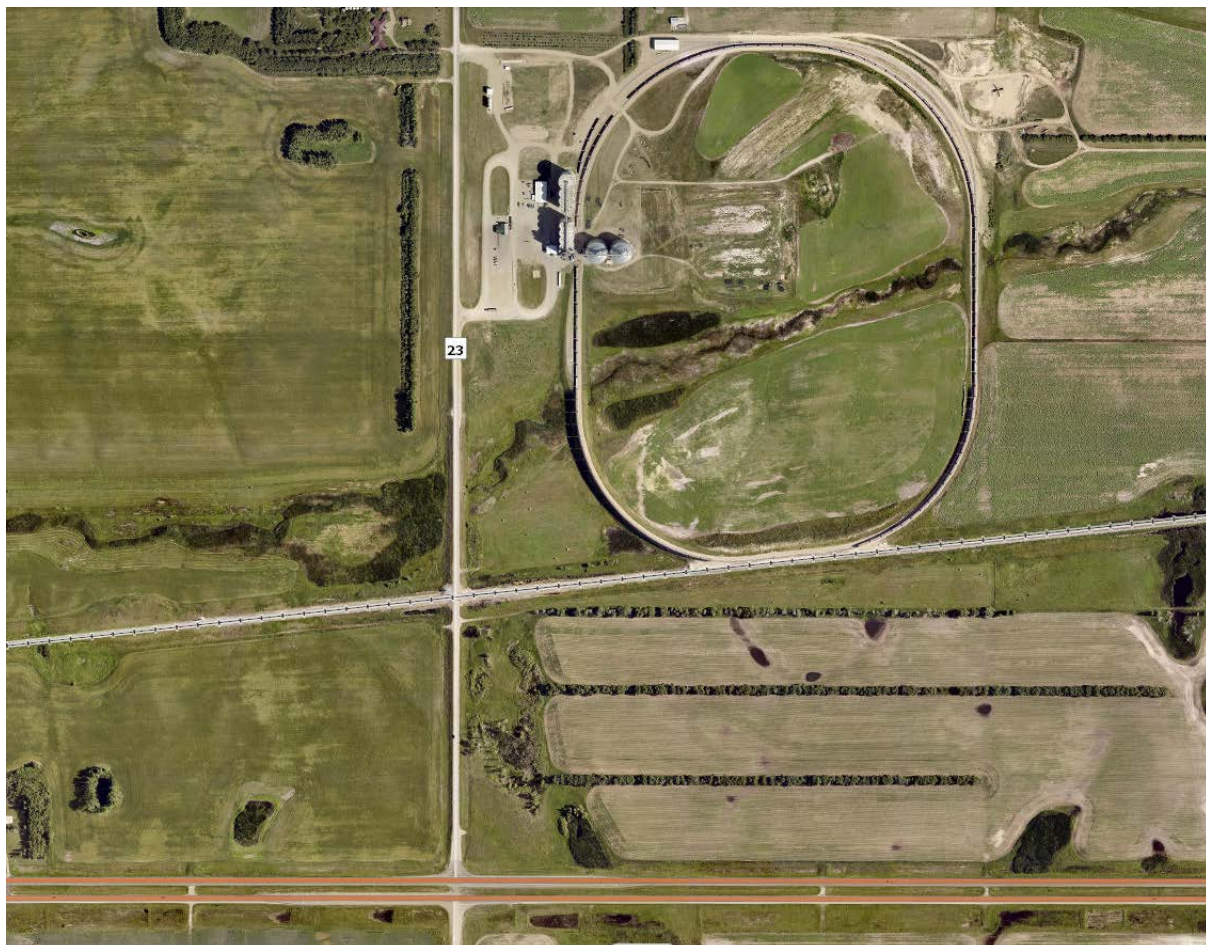
Chairman Thomas and House Agriculture Committee members, my name is Dana Larsen and I serve as the County Engineer for Ward County. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today. I want to express my support for this bill, which will provide grant opportunities to political subdivisions for infrastructure improvements necessary for the development or enhancement of a new or existing value-added agriculture businesses.

In the 2022 Highway and Bridge Needs Study, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute (UGPTI) reports there is a \$444 million need for funding between 2022-2041 in Ward County. This includes \$226 million for county gravel roads, \$204 million for county paved roads, and \$15 million for county bridges. These cost do not include improvements, such as upgrading a gravel road to a paved road or funding for a major structural improvement project.

Our county and township road systems were originally designed to support truck and farm equipment from the 1960s, however the size of the equipment and growth of the traffic have outpaced our road system. Ward County has worked hard to make improvements to our county road system. We have 310 miles of pavement and 400 miles of gravel on our county system. About 15 of those paved miles have been designed or upgraded to meet a year around, 105,500 pound by legal weight load. Which means, we do not put spring load restrictions on these section of road and they serve as the final connection off of the US Highway. The cost to design or improve these segments is much more expensive than to improve or maintain a

traditional county road. We need to stabilize the subgrade soils, use thicker sections of aggregate base and a more durable pavement surface to not only support the heavier load in the spring time, but also the higher traffic volumes. In 2012, we converted five miles of township road to a paved county road, without spring load restrictions. The cost was around \$1 million per mile and I would estimate the cost would be close to double today. Please note, the cost to improve our road systems to meet the higher standard is not factored into the need study. The cost of making these improvements would be on top of our \$444 million need.

We have had to make improvements to a number of county roads to better serve agriculture facilities around the county. For example, when Dakota Midland Grain wanted to construct a new circle track facility, located 8 miles west of Minot, and just north of US Highway 2 on Ward County 23. The county had previously upgraded the county road from gravel to pavement just a few years prior. The road met a 105,500 / 8-ton seasonal load restriction design, prior to the facility being built.



After the elevator was constructed, we removed the seasonal spring restriction on the road section between the elevator and US Highway 2. Within 5 years of the opening of the facility, we needed to place a structural overlay on the roadway due to the asphalt braking up due to truck traffic on the roadway. We were able to address this challenge and continue to provide quality access to the elevator. If a value added facility, would have built in a similar location, but the road would have been a township road, rather than a County Major Collector route, the cost to improve the access to meet the need would have been at least \$2 million, including, intersection upgrades to the US Highway, Railroad Crossing improvements, and construction of a road capable of meeting the year round truck traffic, that a value added facility creates. This would have been a heavy lift for Ward County, and I would guess, for some of my more rural neighboring counties, it may have been even more of a struggle. Without this funding and grant opportunity, it would be challenging for counties to pay for the road improvements needed, which makes the development of a value-added agriculture facility possible.

In general, most trucks do not start and end their route on a State or US Highway. The majority of all truck traffic either starts or ends on a local road. HB 1148 will provide assistance to local governments, allowing them to improve a roadway to meet the needs of value-added agriculture facilities, ensuring the last mile of road is not the final obstacle in a nationally connected road network, serving a global market.

Chairman and committee members, I want to thank you for your time today, and I would ask for your support on HB 1148