

Testimony Prepared for the  
**House Appropriation Committee**

January 18, 2023

By: Nick West, Grand Forks County Engineer

**RE: Support for HB 1147 – Relating to County and Township Bridge Fund**

Chairman Vigesaa and House Appropriations Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1147. I'm excited by the potential impact this bill could have, if passed it certainly would be historic. I am Nick West, the Grand Forks County Engineer, and I also serve on the legislative committee for the ND Association of County Engineers (NDACE). I am here to support the bill as proposed.

First off, I would offer support for the written testimony of Mr. Jason Benson, Cass County Engineer. His reference to the UGPTI Road Needs study, statewide road and bridge needs, agricultural impacts, reference to existing funding mechanisms, inflation, and local needs would be accurate and valid. Grand Forks County would have proportionate needs shown in that study as well.

I'm going to focus my testimony on inflation and major bridges in Grand Forks County. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), recently changed the way bridge inspections are done. In a nut shell, the inspections are more thorough and the ratings are most conservative.

Here's the stats for Grand Forks County bridges for the past year.

1. Grand Forks County has 268-major bridges as defined by FHWA
2. 90%+ of all the Bridges in the County were inspected and re-rated
3. Prior to 2022 – 47 bridges had a ton limit
4. In 2022 – Posted 71 bridges (26% of entire inventory)
5. In 2022 – Posted 24 new bridges (many are on actively traveled roads)
6. Every bridge that previously had a ton limit, now has a lower limit
7. Of the 71 – the average rating went from 35-tons to 15-tons (57% reduction)

Inflation is taking a huge chunk of our buying capability. For example, in 2020 we replaced a bridge with a double 14'x10'x44' concrete box culvert. The material only price was \$137,967. Just last week we got bids for the exact same sized culvert, one-mile away, the material price jumped to \$366,000, that is a 2.66-times fold increase in a two/three-year period. Revenue simply isn't keeping up with inflation.

Its worth noting that other items are feeling the financial stress too: minor structures, culverts and equipment, for example, although not technically covered under this bill could potentially benefit too by the redistribution of other more flexible funding sources.

Grand Forks County and Counties across North Dakota need long term funding solutions to better plan and prioritize future road projects. Increases in state funding through this bill are critical to maintaining our highway and bridge network. Without this additional funding, we will not be able to keep up with the required maintenance and replacement of our bridges and our system will deteriorate. Consistent long-term funding would allow all County's to effectively plan and construct projects.

Chairman Vigesaa and members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and I ask you to support HB 1147.