



Testimony Regarding HB 1147

House Appropriations Committee

January 18, 2023

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

RE: Support for HB 1147 – Relating to a county and township bridge funding

Chairman Vigessaa and House Appropriations Committee members, my name is Dana Larsen and I serve as the County Engineer for Ward County. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1147 which would provide additional funding for bridges on County and Township Roads.

I want to express my support for additional funding to replace our aging structures on county and township roads. Ward County has been very active in inspecting, repairing, maintaining and replacing our bridges when needed. In 2021, Ward County spent around \$990,000 in local funds and \$2,045,000 in federal funds repairing and replacing bridges on county and township roads. Approximate 85% of those funds were spent on township bridges. In the last two years we have replace or performed major rehabilitation on 7 bridges, and currently have five additional bridges under design. Three of those structures qualify for federal aid and two of the structures do not score very well when seeking funding due to the lower traffic volumes and shorter detour length. We plan to bid the projects locally and use local funding to replace them this year. Last January, we requested funding to replace seven bridges. We were fortunate to receive funding to replace one bridge on a county road that was load restricted and it is scheduled to be bid in March. In July we submitted request to replace seven bridges, and were fortunate again to receive funding to replace one of the bridges. I say fortunate because there are a lot of counties applying for the same federal bridge funds.

In 2019, Ward County had put together a bridge plan to replace most of our load restricted or poor condition bridges by 2029. Since that time, the Federal Highway

Administration (FHWA), recently changed the way bridge inspections are done. This required much more detailed inspections and a completely new load rating for almost all of our county and township bridges in the state. Older wood bridges did not fair very well. Ward County had bridges that previously did not require a bridge posting, and now required the county to post the bridge as low as 12 tons. This had a large impact on these township roads. If a bridge rating falls to low, this does not only impact trucks and farm machinery, this means the motorgrader should not cross the bridge when it is out blading the gravel or clearing snow. Prior to the last evaluation, we only had one township bridge with a load posting low enough that a motorgrader should not cross it. Now we currently have six bridges with very low bridge ratings.

Since 2019, the number of bridges on our list to be replaced has greatly increased. We have a list of an additional 18 bridges which are either rated in poor condition, are load restricted, or both. Only one of these bridges is located on a county road, with the remaining bridges located on townships roads. Of the remaining 17 bridges needing to be replaced, six are not eligible for federal funding because the bridge structures are under 20 feet in length. One example is a bridge located southwest of the City of Burlington on a maintained township road. This bridge is under 20 feet in total length, is currently load restricted to 10 tons. If this bill is approved, it would be our hope the funds could be used to help replace many of our aging bridges, including bridges like this one in Burlington Township.



Chairman and committee members, I want to thank you for your time today, and I would ask for your support on HB 1147