



Testimony Prepared for the  
**Senate Appropriations Committee**

March 22, 2023

By: Nick West, Grand Forks County Engineer

### **RE: Support for HB 1379 – Relating to County and Township Bridge Fund**

Chairman Bekkedahl and Senate Appropriations Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1379. 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.

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 47 – the average rating went from 35-tons to 15-tons (57% reduction)

Needless to say, there is a huge need for bridge funding, specifically bridges. The current bridge needs are greater than what is in the UGPTI needs study, as the data in the needs study is out dated due to the recent changes in FHWA requirements.

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 month 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.

Counties need long term stable 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. Consistent long-term funding would allow all County's to effectively plan and construct bridge projects.

Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and I ask for your support on HB 1379.