

## **North Dakota Short Line Railroad Coalition Opposition to HB 1407**

Chairman Ruby and members of the committee, my name is Terry Effertz, and I am here on behalf of the North Dakota Shortline Railroad Coalition to express our opposition to HB 1407. Shortline railroads play a critical role in North Dakota's economy, providing essential freight transportation services that connect our communities and industries to the broader national and international markets. This bill, while well-intentioned, poses significant risks to the sustainability of our transportation ecosystem and could undermine the viability of shortline railroads.

### **1. Adverse Impact on Infrastructure and Safety**

This bill significantly increases allowable gross vehicle weights on North Dakota highways, expanding the maximum on certain highways. While this might seem like an efficient way to handle freight demand, the reality is that higher vehicle weights will result in accelerated wear and tear on state and local roads.

Local authorities often lack the resources to adequately maintain their road infrastructure under current load limits, let alone under the proposed increases. This creates a long-term funding gap, increasing the financial burden on taxpayers and jeopardizing safety for all road users. Shortline railroads offer an alternative that is both cost-effective and sustainable, with the ability to handle large freight volumes while reducing roadway maintenance costs.

### **2. Erosion of Freight Market Balance**

Shortline railroads are a backbone of rural and agricultural freight logistics in North Dakota, handling commodities like grain, oil, and other goods that are critical to our state's economy. Increasing truck weight limits creates an uneven playing field, incentivizing shippers to divert freight from railroads to highways. This diversion will lead to reduced revenue for shortline railroads, many of which operate on razor-thin margins. Without sufficient freight volumes, these railroads may struggle to invest in necessary infrastructure upgrades or even remain operational.

The long-term consequences of this shift will be felt statewide. If shortline railroads are forced to reduce service or close, rural communities will lose a key transportation option, leaving industries reliant on higher-cost trucking and further straining the road network.

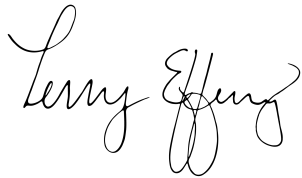
### **3. Uncertainty for Local Road Management**

The bill encourages local authorities to assess and designate roads for higher weight limits. While this sounds reasonable, the reality is that many local governments lack the resources, expertise, or funding to conduct comprehensive road assessments. This creates a patchwork system of weight limits that could lead to confusion for shippers and inconsistent enforcement.

Shortline railroads, by contrast, offer a predictable and reliable transportation option without the need for such complex assessments.

## Conclusion

While we understand the need to address growing freight demands, we believe this bill takes the wrong approach. Instead of increasing truck weight limits, North Dakota should focus on strengthening its multimodal transportation network by supporting shortline railroads and investing in infrastructure improvements for both rail and road systems. A balanced approach will ensure the long-term sustainability, safety, and economic vitality of our transportation system. We respectfully urge this committee to give HB 1407 a Do Not Pass recommendation and protect our state's infrastructure for future generations. Thank you for your time and consideration.



Terry Effertz  
Executive Director  
ND ShortLine Railroad Coalition

