

Testimony of Laura Lacher
North Dakota Ethanol Producers Association
Opposition of HB 1614
February 13, 2025

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee,

My name is Laura Lacher, I am the executive director of the North Dakota Ethanol Producers Association (NDEPA). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1614, this legislation could have significant implications for the future of transportation and commerce in North Dakota. The ability to efficiently and reliably move goods across our state is essential to maintaining our economic growth and competitiveness. HB 1614 would place unnecessary restrictions on innovative technologies that could help address workforce shortages and enhance supply chain efficiency, particularly in industries that rely on heavy freight transportation like ethanol production.

The ethanol industry is a key driver of North Dakota's economy, supporting rural communities, creating jobs and fostering innovation. A critical component of our industry's success is the ability to efficiently transport feedstocks, finished products and byproducts. Given the persistent challenges in securing truck drivers and the significant freight need in our state, we believe that emerging autonomous transportation technologies offer a viable solution to support our supply chain and maintain North Dakota economic competitiveness.

For years, North Dakota has successfully utilized lead-follow autonomous trucking operations, such as those employed in the sugar beet industry, which have demonstrated both safety and efficiency. These operations, supported by extensive research from institutions like North Dakota State University's Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, provide a roadmap for expanding autonomous transportation in a way that enhances productivity while maintaining safety.

Autonomous trucking holds great potential for our industry, particularly in moving freight to and from ethanol facilities and farms supplying out sites. Additionally, emerging technologies could play a key role

in supporting enhanced oil recovery (EOR) by enabling this transportation of CO2 through lead-follow or other autonomous methods. Prohibiting autonomous trucking in North Dakota would not only stifle innovation but also place unnecessary restrictions on industries looking to improve logistics, reduce costs and address workforce shortages.

Rather than outright prohibition, we would like to encourage the Legislator to work with industry stakeholders, researchers and transportation experts to establish a framework that ensures the safe and responsible deployment of autonomous trucking technologies in our state. By fostering innovation, North Dakota can remain at the forefront of economic and technological advancement in freight transportation.

For these reasons, the North Dakota Ethanol Producers Association respectfully urge a “Do Not Pass” recommendation on HB 1614. Thank you for your time and consideration, I would be happy to answer any questions.