



SENATE BILL NO. 2151  
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS DIVISION  
TERRY WANZEK, CHAIR  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2151

Chairman Wanzek and members of the Senate appropriations Government Operations Division. I am Parrell Grossman, and it is my privilege to be the Legislative Director for the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association. I appear in support of Senate Bill 2151.

The North Dakota Soybean Growers Association advocates for 8,900 operations that raise soybeans in North Dakota. In 2024, those soybean farmers planted 6,600,000 acres of soybeans, producing over 245 million bushels of soybeans.

This legislation, providing a dedicated source of funding to support the maintenance, repair, and replacement of bridges in counties and townships, is very critical to rural North Dakota.

According to the Upper Great Plains Transportation Industry's October, 2024 Report to the North Dakota Legislative Assembly, the estimated bridge investment and maintenance needs for county, township and tribal bridges for 2024-2043 is \$178.9M. According to the Report, most of the improvement needs are determined by the study's improvement model to be backlog needs and occur during the first study biennium.

This Committee is already well-aware that a 2022 North Dakota Agriculture Industry Economic Contribution Analysis conducted by the NDSU Department of Agriculture, the economic contribution to North Dakota is \$30.8 billion, including \$18.8 billion from direct output and \$12 billion from secondary output. The Association encourages this legislature to continue to significantly invest in agriculture in North Dakota. Repairing or replacing bridges in rural areas is, in fact, investing in agriculture, although this funding ultimately will serve many purposes and benefit many people.

Bridges in rural areas that need repair or replacement are a significant concern for many reasons:

Unreliable or closed bridges can result in significant agricultural disruption. Soybean farmers rely heavily on timely access to fields and markets. Bridge closures can disrupt planting, harvesting, and transportation of goods, impacting the ability of farmers to get products to market and, resultingly, their livelihoods. Businesses in rural areas may face difficulties transporting goods and accessing customers due to bridge limitations. For farmers, bridge problems can delay the timely delivery of their inputs like fuel, seed, fertilizer, and pesticides, which may significantly impact their operations from planting to harvesting.

In addition, weight restrictions on bridges result in reduced load capacity and force farmers to take detours, increasing travel time and potentially damaging costly heavier equipment.

Safety hazards are an overriding priority. Deteriorating bridges pose a serious risk of structural collapse, potentially leading to tragic accidents. Poor bridge conditions can increase risks and contribute to accidents due to uneven surfaces, inadequate clearance, and reduced visibility. Reliable bridges ensure our rural students in the entire state get safely to school activities and back to their homes.

Bridges have an economic impact. Limited access resulting from deteriorating bridges can isolate rural communities or residents and hinder access to essential services like healthcare, education, and markets.

Bridges are important for emergency response in rural areas. Delayed response times due to deteriorating bridges can obstruct vehicles like ambulances and fire trucks from reaching residents in need of emergency services. In addition, in case of natural disasters, damaged bridges can create difficulties or complicate evacuation efforts, putting lives at risk.

Closed or failing bridges can reduce quality of life. Reliable bridges, as part of good rural road systems, facilitate social interaction by allowing easier travel to visit friends and family, and attend community events. Further, bridge closures can increase feelings of isolation and limit social interaction within and between communities.

As informed legislators, who should be able to rely on the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute's October Report, you certainly understand the bridge predicament rural North Dakota currently is facing. It is prudent to take measures to avoid it becoming a disaster. The Association respectfully suggests this legislative funding scheme is a necessary and appropriate step.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Government Operations Division, the Association respectfully urges you, after thoughtful consideration and debate, to give Senate Bill 2151 a "Do Pass" recommendation.

Thank you and I would be pleased to answer any questions.