

January 9, 2025

Senate Transportation
SB 2062

CHAIRMAN CLEMENS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Cecile Wehrman. I represent the North Dakota Newspaper Association and the state's 73 member newspapers.

We oppose adoption of Senate Bill 2062.

The Department of Transportation seeks to cut official county newspapers from the requirement to publish requests for bids for construction work on the grounds there are cheaper and better ways to reach contractors, industry stakeholders and other interested parties.

There's only one problem – cutting newspapers cuts the general public out of the equation by removing the geographic connection between a major construction project and the people who ultimately pay for it. The average citizen may not even know a project is in the works in their vicinity until a bid notice appears in their local newspaper. One of the beauties of public notice is the serendipitous discovery of information the reader does not know they care about until they see it published locally.

By removing notice to the general public – even though they have no intention of bidding on such a project -- you remove the public's knowledge about how government dollars are potentially being spent and the scope of a project that may have future impacts on their local government, commerce or travel. Practically speaking, local people cannot monitor state websites on a continual basis in search of information that may impact them locally. That's why they rely on newspapers. The notion there is no cost associated with alternate dissemination methods is false. Labor in updating information, maintaining electronic infrastructure such as websites, and subscriptions to other platforms also costs money. The state should certainly avail themselves of these new modes of notification, but when newspapers are cut from the equation you are cutting taxpayers from receiving information they have a right and interest to know about.

Newspapers also play a critical role, not only in archiving public notice, but by creating a printed record that cannot be altered, lost or changed electronically.

In a recent survey, 8 out of 10 North Dakotans named newspapers as the preferred method for receiving public notice, over government websites.

On behalf of North Dakota's newspapers and their 300,000 readers, I urge a DO NOT PASS on SB 2062.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer questions.

Government Websites vs. Newspapers

Eight out of 10 North Dakota adults (82%) believe that an independent third-party should deliver public notices versus having them only available on government websites

	North Dakota Adults
I think newspapers as an independent third-party source should deliver this important information to the public	82%
I think government can be trusted to be the only source of public notices	18%

Do you think state or local governments should stop publishing public notices in local newspapers/newspaper websites and only publish them on their websites?