SENATE BILL NO. 2142
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
DAVID A. CLEMENS, CHAIR
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2020

Chairman Clemmons and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. My name is 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 2142.

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

There are many valid and even compelling reasons for this legislature to enact this legislation to assist in funding road and bridges for townships. The need for improved and safe roads and bridges is critical. Many of these rural township roads are either in need of repairs, or the maintenance is expensive. Good roads and bridges are vital for farmers and rural communities.

The first area of concern is transportation of goods. Farmers need to transport their crops to the markets, processing plants or distribution centers. For farmers, these roads are always the first miles to get their crops to the market. Farmers need good roads for bringing in supplies. Farmers also rely on roads to receive essential inputs like seeds, fertilizers, livestock feed, and equipment.

These roads are important for access to services, including reaching healthcare, providing education, and providing emergency services. Good roads are crucial for accessing hospitals and clinics for rural residents, as well as for veterinarians for animal care. Rural students need to travel to schools, and teachers and other professionals need to commute to work. It might be an understatement to say that fire trucks, ambulances, and law enforcement vehicles need to reach rural areas quickly in case of emergencies.

Economic Development, just like in urban areas, is very important to rural areas. Well-maintained infrastructure makes rural areas more attractive to businesses,

potentially leading to job creation and economic growth. Most of these rural areas desperately need to increase their tax base to provide services and infrastructure to their residents.

There might even be opportunities for tourism in some of these rural areas. Rural North Dakota is a treasure trove of scenic beauty with interesting landscapes, clear skies with views of the stars, and an abundance of wildlife and sounds of nature. Good roads improve access to scenic areas, attracting tourists and boosting local economies.

Good roads in rural areas are important to quality of life. Roads facilitate social interaction and community building by allowing easier travel to visit friends, family, and attend community events. Good roads reduce isolation. For some, rural areas can often feel isolated. Good roads help connect people to the wider area and reduce feelings of remoteness.

Finally, safety demands good roads and bridges. Safety concerns dictate that we do everything reasonable possible to ensure safety. Roads or bridges that need improvement or replacement are the proverbial "just waiting for an accident to happen." We have an obligation to our townships and rural North Dakota to ensure that does not happen.

These township roads were originally made for horse drawn carriages and now we have semi trucks on these roads. In addition, water drainage in many areas has been very damaging.

Local township funding simply is not sufficient to support the required improvements, and our rural areas definitely require financial assistance to resolve what quickly could become a crisis. The agricultural economy is hugely important and beneficial to all of North Dakota. These farmers need some better roads to cross these first miles to get their crops to market. It doesn't seem to be asking too much.

For the reasons stated the Association respectfully asks the Senate Transportation Committee to give Senate Bill 2142 a "Do Pass" recommendation.

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