

Support of SB2142

Senate Transportation Committee

January 17, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Clemens and Committee members.

I am Larry Syverson from Mayville. I grow soybeans on my farm in Traill County. I am the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors for Roseville Township in Traill County and the Executive Director of the North Dakota Township Officers Association. NDTOA represents 6,000 Township Officers serving more than 1,400 dues-paying member townships.

I was reminded yesterday that in 2023, agriculture was computed to have a 30.8 billion dollar impact on North Dakota's economy. That takes a lot of product; that product takes a lot of trucks. We all know that the products of agriculture come from the dirt. The first mile in that trip from the dirt of North Dakota's fields to the grocery store shelves and coolers is most likely on a township road.

It is not one-way traffic on those roads either, tons of inputs are needed. Seed, fertilizer, chemicals, feed for livestock, and all kinds of equipment need to be delivered. The last mile for most of those inputs is also a township road. Trips for other goods and services add to the traffic, and that traffic takes a toll.

The problem with township roads is that, almost without exception, they are gravel roads. Gravel spread on top of a poorly built base made of the top-soil from the ditch pushed up into a grade. These roads might be ok for lightweight traffic in dry conditions, but they are not standing up to modern use. A truck does not even need to be overloaded to have an effect on such a road.

Townships do not treat all roads the same; they have their own priority list. Some roads get the greatest attention while others get little or none, depending on use and need. There are some 54,000 miles of township roads in the state that are certified as maintained miles. But there are also thousands of miles of roads that may have been abandoned because of disuse or

never built up because of lack of need or topography and might only exist as prairie trails. There is no accounting of the unimproved or abandoned roads; they are just not included in the certified list. Of the listed maintained roads, some are used less than average, others are used more than average, and each receives the appropriate level of maintenance. You are going to be given some cost-per-mile figures, please remember that these are average figures. Some roads will require a bit less and other more impacted roads will need a lot more.

Roads that bear the brunt of the load may need to be reconstructed with the necessary, proper compaction and soil stabilizers and then built up as truck routes. This will be very expensive, but these routes will become the local corridors of the state's transportation system.

How do we handle the cost? Townships have a minimal self-funding ability; their property tax levy is limited to 18 mills. With a special election, a township might be able to raise its limit to 36 mills, which would be good for a maximum of five years. The likelihood of some form of property tax caps coming out of this session could make increasing the township levy challenging to accomplish.

Since the beginning of the current oil boom, the legislature has helped the townships with several one-time grants, which were very helpful and for which townships are very grateful. But those payments run out and are not at all predictable. There have been two funds set up to help townships on a more continuing, predictable, and hopefully permanent basis. The County and Township Infrastructure Fund (Prairie Dog) and a fund from the legacy earnings stream. The townships are very grateful for these infusions of welcome funds as we struggle to overcome decades of underfunding roads. We hope to build on this.

Our goal in SB2142 is to achieve a predictable fund that will be significant enough to overcome decades of underfunding and undermaintenance.

As I am in the building all the time and available to answer your questions, I will let those who traveled to be here today testify now. I want to introduce two members of the NDTOA

Board of Directors to speak further on behalf of the association. Todd Weber is the NDTOA Vice President; he will be followed by Tim Geinert, the NDTOA District 6 Director.

I thank them for driving in to testify today. I also thank the others in the room who are here to support dependable, budgetable funding for townships.

Chairman Clemens and committee members, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. Please give SB2142 your favorable consideration. This concludes my prepared statement. I will try to answer any questions you might have.