

Testimony Prepared for the
House Transportation Committee

March 4, 2021

By: Jason Benson, Cass County Engineer



RE: Opposition to SB 2026 – Road Train Excess Limit Authorization

Chairman Ruby and House Transportation Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2026. I am Jason Benson, the Cass County Engineer, and I also serve as the legislative committee chair for the ND Association of County Engineers. I am here to oppose the bill as proposed.

The road infrastructure that is used today has not been designed to accommodate the latest size and load limits. Although our members understand the per axle weight limits under the proposed “road train” bill would not increase, there would be a significant change to weight distributions on bridge infrastructure. Also, local road infrastructure would have no possible way to accommodate turning radiuses or turn outs with such long loads. Having longer and heavier units on these roads will unnecessarily increase the safety risk for our traveling public.

There are several concerns that we have regarding the new bill language, the need for the pilot program, and impacts to County road infrastructure. First, is to look at what roads are available for road trains. Federal regulations state that all national network roads are ineligible for the use of Road Trains (see “pink” routes on attached national network map). These national network roads are eligible to be 129,000-pound routes, but again, not for road trains. Therefore, the only NDDOT roads eligible for Road Trains are non-national network highways, as well as County, Township, and City roads.

This means any pilot program will most likely rely on County roads and bridges. Relying on Counties to provide roads for a pilot program will be difficult as I have not spoken to one County official who has supported road trains. In fact, Richland and Grand Forks County recently passed resolutions formally opposing road trains.

Next, let us look at the need for road trains. The current 129,000-pound network was established by the ND Legislature in 2017 with highways US 83, US 85, US 2,

US 52, I29, and I94 designated as 129,000-pound routes. Since 2017, only a handful of other ND State Highways have been requested to be 129,000-pound routes and only two routes were requested in 2020 (see “yellow” routes on attached 129,000-pound network map). As you can see, there has not been an overwhelming demand for 129,000-pound routes. The NDDOT 129,000-pound network designation comes through requests by industry for State Highways to be designated for 129,000-pound trucks. Based on the low demand for 129,000-pound routes, where is the demand for road trains?

To establish a Road Train Pilot Program, you need trucks outfitted to be road trains. If there is not a need for more 129,000-pound highways in ND, what trucking company is going to buy a handful of Road Train, three or more trailer units to run as a test. To date I am not aware of any businesses testifying that they are supporting road trains and ready to acquire these road train vehicle configurations to support a pilot program.

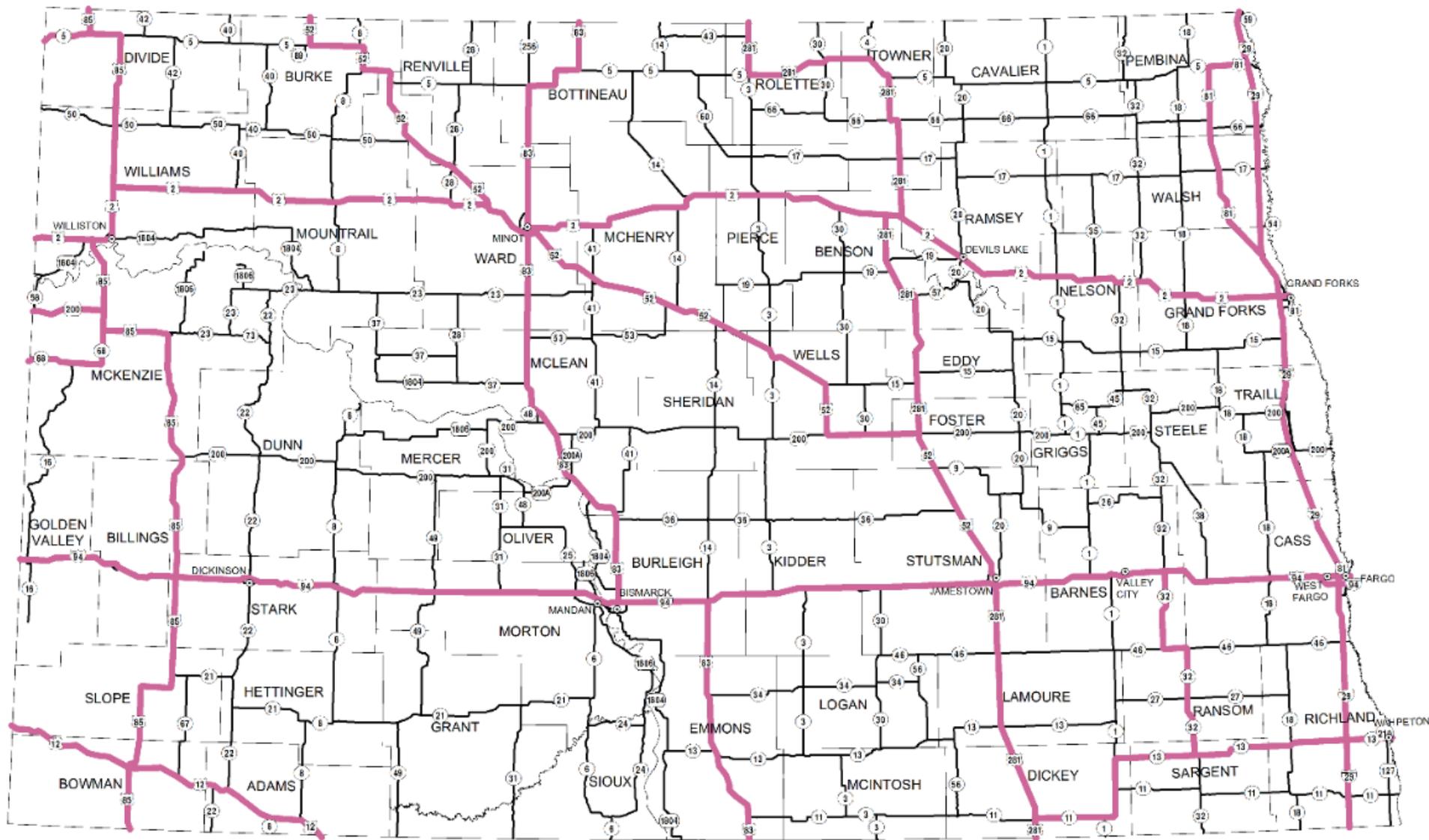
With the challenges of not being able to use road trains on the national network roads, if Counties will not support road train routes on their network, then this leaves only our non-national NDDOT network roads. With these limited roadways to pick from, who in industry is going to provide the trucks to test this out.

Finally, nearly every truckload in the state starts on a local road whether it is a city street, township road, or county highway. Any pilot program would have to have buy in from the local road authorities to get these road trains from the state highway to its destination.

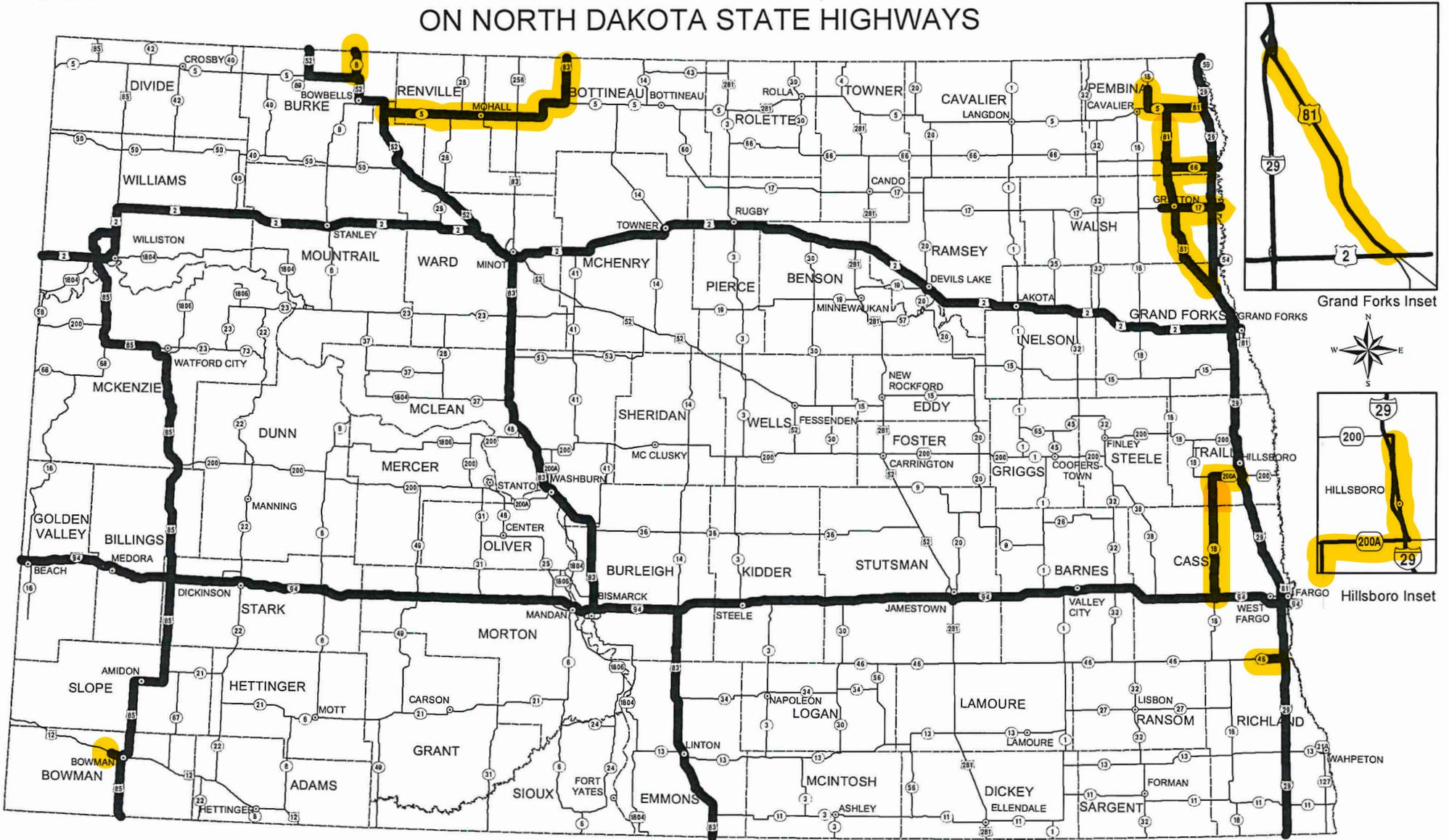
Chairman Ruby and committee members, I want to reiterate that NDACE opposes the bill as written. I want to stress our current opposition of the bill is concerned with the lack of local oversight, independent evaluation, and infrastructure and safety concerns. Let us work with the system we have, and continue to evaluate and grow our 129,000-pound network rather than start a new system for road trains.

APPENDIX A

North Dakota National Network



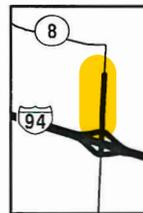
DESIGNATED PERMITTABLE ROUTES EXCEEDING 105,500 POUNDS UP TO 129,000 POUNDS ON NORTH DAKOTA STATE HIGHWAYS



— Vehicles may be permitted up to what is allowed by inner and outer bridge formula not to exceed 129,000 pounds

NOTE 1 : For information on overall length allowed see NDHP Policy 9-1 Annex B.

NOTE 2 : No individual trailer can exceed 53 feet.



Red Trail Energy
Richardton Inset



Mandan Inset

APPROVED:

NDDOT DIRECTOR

11-19-20
DATE