

March 6, 2025

House Transportation Committee SB 2062

CHAIRMAN RUBY AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Jack McDonald. I'm a Bismarck attorney and lobbyist here today representing the North Dakota Newspaper Association and the state's 73 member newspapers.

We oppose Senate Bill 2062 and ask that you give it a DO NOT PASS.

The Department of Transportation wants to drop official county newspapers - and their readers - from the requirement to publish requests for bids for construction work going through those counties because - it says - there are cheaper and better ways to reach industry stakeholders and other interested parties.

There's only one problem - cutting newspapers cuts the general public out of the equation by removing the greatest source North Dakotans living in those counties of knowing that a major highway project will be going through where they live. It wants to cut the major connection between a highway construction project and the people who ultimately pay for it.

The average citizen would not be aware of these construction plans until they see this bid notice in their local papers. 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 in their local newspaper.

County residents are not sitting down with their morning coffee and reading the Department of Transportation's web page. But they are reading their local papers. By dropping this notice the department is removing the public's knowledge about how their government dollars are being spent and the scope of a project that will have future impacts on their local government, commerce or travel.

The cost of these notices, as you heard from the department, is negligible in comparison to the cost of the projects.

And, what they didn't mention is that there are also costs associated with alternate dissemination methods such as labor in updating information, maintaining electronic infrastructure such as websites, and subscriptions to other platforms. The state should certainly use these new modes of notification, but when newspapers are cut out you are cutting out the taxpayers who have a right to know about this.

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 time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.