

Testimony of Laura Lacher

North Dakota Ethanol Producers Association

In Support of HB 1614

March 20, 2025

Chairman Clemens and members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

My name is Laura Lacher, executive director of the North Dakota Ethanol Producers Association. NDEPA represents North Dakota's ethanol plants, industry stakeholders and associated businesses. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the HB 1614 regarding a study of autonomous and semiautonomous vehicle technologies. This study is a critical step toward understanding how emerging transportation advancements can support North Dakota's economy, enhance supply chain efficiency, and address workforce challenges.

The ethanol industry is a key contributor to North Dakota's economic success, supporting rural communities, creating jobs, and driving innovation. Efficient and reliable transportation is essential to our industry, ensuring the movement of feedstocks, finished products, and byproducts. Given ongoing workforce shortages, particularly in trucking, autonomous transportation technologies offer a promising solution to maintaining supply chain stability and keeping North Dakota industries competitive.

North Dakota has already demonstrated success in lead-follow autonomous trucking operations, particularly in the sugar beet industry, where extensive research from institutions like North Dakota State University's Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute has shown both safety and efficiency benefits. Expanding these technologies could further support ethanol production by improving freight movement and logistics, as well as assisting in enhanced oil recovery (EOR) through CO₂ transportation.

This study provides an opportunity to establish a framework for safe and responsible deployment of autonomous trucking technologies in our state. By working with industry stakeholders, researchers, and transportation experts, North Dakota can lead in developing policies that foster innovation while ensuring public safety.

NDEPA appreciates the legislature's commitment to this important issue and thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.