
TO: Joint Legislative Transportation Vision Task Force

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SUBJECT: Written Testimony

MEETING DATE & LOCATION: September 6, Salina, KS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On behalf of the Concordia City Commission and CloudCorp: Cloud County Economic Development, I would like to submit our written testimony in support of a geometric improvement project at the corner of 1st Street and U.S. 81 Highway. The improvement includes adding a turning lane for southbound traffic on U.S. 81 to accommodate slow moving ag equipment and trucks. This geometric improvement benefits our largest industry in Cloud County while also improving the safety for those travelling along U.S. Highway 81.

The City of Concordia recognizes limited resources require prioritization of funding for projects. We work hard to maintain our city's existing infrastructure, and we advocate for KDOT to preserve funding for transportation infrastructure maintenance through their various grant programs available to Kansas municipalities. We also know there are geometric improvement projects that will contribute to the safe and efficient flow of traffic in our Kansas communities, and that a quality transportation system is critical for rural Kansas economies. Funding must also remain available for these geometric improvement projects. That said, today we are advocating for a specific geometric improvement project to promote safe and efficient traffic flow in Concordia.

We were recently denied KDOT funding for the third consecutive time for a simple and relatively inexpensive geometric improvement project that will directly and positively impact traffic flow for the largest industry in our area: agriculture. We appreciate the effort put forth by KDOT's assistant bureau chief Todd Salfrank to visit with us about the specific reason why our application was denied: KDOT had funded a large and expensive bridge 20 years ago to help funnel traffic over existing railroad tracks through town. While this bridge accomplished a large part of that goal, it did not adequately address the needs of large, slow-moving agricultural truck traffic that needs to turn off US Highway 81 and ultimately onto Kansas Highway 9 to reach their destination. Specifically, west-bound turns by south-bound traffic are of concern, and KDOT's preferred intersection is too constricted to provide sufficient space for such maneuvering. Our crash data is not sufficient to warrant a high priority for funding, according to KDOT representatives. However, we would like to mitigate this problem before crash data accumulates.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The corner of 1st Street and U.S. 81 has become a natural bypass for slow-moving equipment and agricultural trucks. Southbound ag traffic prefers to turn west at the 1st Street exit for three main reasons:

- It provides the most direct route for dumping grain at the Concordia AgMark Terminal and the Cloud County Coop.
- It provides the most direct route to westbound Kansas Highway 9 and Kansas Highway 28 for large scale equipment coming from Concordia Tractor Inc.(located North of Concordia on 81.)
- It is an easier turn than the 6th and 81 Highway turn. The aforementioned corner does provide a four-way stop with lights and turning lane lights, but the corner is land-locked and too congested to provide a cost-effective solution for a southbound west turn.

The most cost-effective solution would be to build a turning lane at the corner of 1st and U.S. 81. The land has already been purchased by the City of Concordia. Demo work was done to eliminate the building on the site and the city has provided fencing from the adjacent private property. This property is represented by the white block in the following two photos:



The white block is the land that has been purchased and graded for a turning lane.



The red line showcases the natural bypass utilized by slow-moving ag traffic to AgMark, the Cloud County Coop and Kansas highways 9 and 28.

SAFETY

The most important reason for adding a turning lane is safety. Without a turning lane, the fast-moving traffic along Highway 81 runs the risk of slamming into the back of a slow-moving vehicle. The speed limit southbound on 81 slows to 35 mph shortly before this intersection. This becomes particularly hazardous during harvest times. This entry into Concordia is the only way to cross the Republican River. Alternative routes add 20+ miles to the trip.



This photo showcases the problem at the intersection. As trucks turn west, it often causes a slowdown in both lanes of traffic. If there is another vehicle on 1st Street, large trucks must swing into both lanes on U.S. 81 to make the turn.

COMMUNITY & INDUSTRY SUPPORT

We understand that one of the goals of this committee is to assist economic growth in the community. This project directly impacts our existing agriculture industries, particularly with AgMark, the Cloud County Coop, and Concordia Tractor, Inc. We have obtained several letters of support from our industry leaders advocating for this geometric fix.