



Testimony of the Kansas Association of Counties
To the House Transportation Committee on
HB 2095
February 2, 2017

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a neutral conferee on HB 2095. Our testimony is offered on behalf of the Kansas Association of Counties and the Kansas County Highway Officials Association, an affiliate organization of KAC, which is comprised of county engineers and road supervisors throughout the state.

I first want to compliment all the parties working on this legislative issue. We have been a very collegial working group, sharing information amongst ourselves and staying in communication. Public policy is always better when both sides of the issue are working with each other.

Kansas counties support the agricultural economy and recognize its positive effects on both the state and local units of government. We want to promote the ag industry when possible. However, Kansas counties also own and maintain 109,000 miles of roads, constituting 82% of all the roads in Kansas. We own and maintain 19,468 bridges--77% of all the bridges in Kansas. As such, heavier trucks are always a concern for us because of the impact on both roads and bridges.

We believe HB 2095's proposal to increase truck weights to 90,000 with the addition of a third axle is a responsible way of approaching the increased weight. So long as the amount of material hauled over roads remains the same, and the legislation does not increase traffic, we are not anticipating significant damage to our roads.

In analyzing this legislation, the county engineers and road supervisors quickly moved off their concerns about the roads and focused on the impact on bridges. Bridges must be inspected for the increased weight to determine if they are safe. As noted, we have over 19,000 bridges in the state. Last year on similar legislation (HB 2644) we testified that the cost to inspect bridges for load rates could run up to \$30 million. The timing of this legislation is impeccable, however, as the Kansas Department of Transportation is currently undertaking a statewide bridge inspection, and that project can incorporate the new weight of 90,000 during its analysis. The KDOT load rating project is funded with federal bridge replacement funds.

We are concerned, however, about the reliability of the funds; we do request that the committee verify with KDOT whether it can in fact 1. undertake the project without additional costs passed to the counties, and 2. whether the federal funds require matching state funds and whether those state funds will be provided.

We also ask the committee to confirm with KDOT the expected timeline for the bridge inspection project. We are hearing the project may take eight years. If the legislation goes into effect July 1, but bridges are not inspected for eight years, a serious gap of time is created, which would result in counties closing bridges until such time that they can be inspected. As you can surmise, a county is not going to risk public safety for a bridge in question that hasn't been inspected for the new weight restrictions, and therefore the conservative alternative is to close the bridge.

Another point of observation for the committee is that the railroads in Kansas pay approximately \$75 million annually in property tax. As you know, local government relies heavily on property tax (and the state also accounts for 20 mills for public education). We raise the question whether HB 2095 will impact the railroads to the detriment of the property tax base. We encourage the committee to consider this issue and to thoroughly review it.

I am happy to stand for questions, but as I am not the subject-matter expert on roads and bridges; I may need to seek information from county officials and relay it back to the committee. We appreciate your consideration of our testimony and will work to answer any questions from the committee.

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