

McKenzie County Sheriffs Department

Ron Rankin, Sheriff

Telephone: 701-444-3654 Fax: 701-444-2105
201 5th St. NW
P.O. Box 591
Watford City, North Dakota 58854

May 28, 2010

Honorable Kent Conrad
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6100

Senator Conrad,

Sir, in addressing your request for testimony on "Improving Safety Along the US 85 Corridor", I submit the following.

Speaking strictly from a law enforcement point of view and directed only to US Hwy. 85 and its transition through McKenzie County, the safety problems I am facing as Sheriff is caused by the **increased volume of traffic**. I do not know for sure, but I am working and planning my department's strategy under the assumption that the oil production has not yet reached its peak.

The safety concerns created by the increased traffic volume are, first of all an increase in the number of accidents. I am aware that you have the statistics on the number of fatal accidents on Hwy. 85 for 2009 and 2010. However, the number of accidents investigated on Hwy. 85 in McKenzie County, in 2006 were 49, 2007 47, 2008 55, and 2009 53. These figures are taken from the North Dakota Drivers License and Traffic Safety Division. This does not count all car/deer accidents. Secondly, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of 911 and non-911 "Traffic Violations" complaints/reports received by our office. These are complaints that deal with speeding motorist, passing where prohibited, reckless driving, and possible drunk drivers. There are also many reports of near collisions caused by reckless driving. Each of these calls requires a Deputy to respond and attempt contact.

Of major concern to me as Sheriff is that these issues are not limited to Hwy. 85, they are county wide. McKenzie County is as you know the largest county in the state. Not only do I have Hwy. 85 to deal with but I also have Hwy. 23, Hwy 200, North and South, Hwy's 22, 23, 68,16, 15, and all of the county roads. This is a concern because even though we enjoy the complete cooperation of the Williston District North Dakota State Highway Patrol, I have only six deputies that must not only deal with highway concerns, but other law enforcement related issues. This reflects in our response time and places a strain on an already stretched to the limit manpower level.

As Sheriff, I see the safety concerns of US Hwy. 85 being caused by a significant increase in the volume of traffic along that corridor and the inherent problems associated with a heavy traffic flow. Short of making Hwy. 85 a 4-lane highway, I see “Super 2’s”, and turn out lanes placed strategically along Hwy. 85, with an increased law enforcement presence as being a helpful part of the solution. Having marked patrol vehicles routinely patrolling along any stretch of highway will have a proactive effect on the traffic flow.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns regarding the safety issues of the US Hwy. 85 corridor through McKenzie County. I only hope that I have been able to assist you in your decision making process.

Respectfully,

Ron Rankin
Sheriff,
McKenzie County, ND