

Investing In Our Future – The Role of Infrastructure
May 28, 2009

Good Morning! My name is Ward Koeser and I have served for 15 years as the President of the Board of City Commissioners for Williston. Thank you Senator Conrad for coming to our city to hold this hearing so that you can better understand the issues relevant to our community.

Although we're working hard to diversify our economy, agriculture and oil remain as the main pillars holding up our economic base. Agriculture has played a key role ever since the settlers moved here more than a hundred years ago while oil has been a part of our lives since oil was first discovered near Tioga in the early 1950's. The vast majority of our citizens in Northwest North Dakota have ties to at least one of these two industries with over 20% of Williston workers being employed in the oil field.

The City of Williston has worked hard to provide the infrastructure needed for these and other industries to thrive. Improvements have been made to our water system, schools, airport, streets, and roads. We recognize that for our city to grow and prosper, adequate infrastructure must be in place and well maintained.

As we look to the years ahead and evaluate what needs to be done to position our community for a bright and prosperous future, we recognize that improving the connections of our city to the rest of North Dakota and the world needs to be a high priority. This is why we wholeheartedly support the development of the US Highway 85 corridor.

Communities with strong agriculture and oil industries require a tremendous amount of transportation for the products produced. Thousands of truckloads of farm products such as durum, wheat, peas, lentils, corn, potatoes, and sugar beets need to find their way from the field to the elevator or processing plant. The farm trucks hauling these commodities need good, solid roads capable of handling heavy loads.

The oil industry requires even more truck hauling. Pickups, trucks, and semis fill our roads as drilling, service and production oil companies haul heavy equipment, water, diesel fuel and crude oil from Williston to well site and well site to pipeline loading facility. Convoys of large and heavy trucks move oil rigs and travel to wells for production stimulation and other service jobs. Moving convoys of trucks on two lane roads create safety issues as travelers become impatient to pass slow moving vehicles and risk their own safety as well as those they meet. A four lane corridor in the heavily traveled areas would be of great benefit.

Infrastructure investment in the US Highway 85 corridor will help our oil and ag industries grow to meet an increasing world demand. Our region has the potential to feed and fuel America. As the corridor improves, so will the speed and safety with which our products move to market. The Highway 85 corridor travels through the bread basket of America and the energy beltway of the United States.

It's common to see pickups and trucks with Texas, Oklahoma, and Colorado license plates in our community. And, it's common for our oilfield workers to travel south to other oil production regions of the country. A good road system for these workers to travel on saves time and money and provides for a safe arrival.

The Bakken oil formation has the potential for us to meet a greater portion of America's demand for energy but it will require an investment in infrastructure. As the benefits will be nationwide, it's fitting that the federal government should be involved in the funding of these improvements. An improved Highway 85 corridor will be good for Williston and especially good for America.