

# **How Infrastructure Investments Can Bolster North Dakota's Energy and Agriculture Economies: The US 85 Corridor**

## **A Future Success Story**

Good morning Senator Conrad and Staff! My name is Brad Bekkedahl, and I am currently the Finance Commissioner for the City of Williston. I want to thank you for bringing this Senate Budget Committee Field Hearing to Williston and allowing me the opportunity to present testimony on the importance of infrastructure investments for the US 85 Corridor. It is a crucial link in producing and moving the commodities produced in our agriculture and energy economy here in North Dakota. I hope my testimony of a success story for infrastructure investment will be an asset to the other testimony presented here today.

My background for this presentation is my involvement in economic development issues for western North Dakota. In my role as an elected official, I have worked cooperatively with other local, state, and federal officials and agencies to promote the development and diversification of our economy. In my research to perform these duties in 1996, I discovered the importance of infrastructure, particularly four lane highways, to moving goods and services safely and efficiently from points of production, to manufacturing and adding value, and finally to distribution to destinations and final markets. In 1997, I was elected President of the Communities For a Modern Highway 2, a North Dakota communities group seeking to complete a four lane corridor on US Highway 2 that was planned to go from Grand Forks in eastern North Dakota to Williston in western North Dakota, but had only been completed from Grand Forks to Minot. Working as an advocacy group to promote infrastructure development, we were able to get the last 100 miles of this four lane corridor completed in 2008. It was the successful coordination of planning and commitment at the state and federal elected and agency levels that saw this completion in less than 7 years. At the time, no one could have predicted what would happen to the economy of North Dakota, particularly northwest North Dakota, but a crystal ball could not have even put the infrastructure investment in place at a better time. The development of legume crops on our summer fallow ground has substantially increased our agricultural production capability, and investments by private capital have reacted with facilities to add value to these crops in our local communities. This increase in production has also increased our need for fuel, fertilizer, and equipment. Highway 2 has been the corridor for much of that transit of goods in and out of our area, and its presence as a completed corridor has been a stimulus for our economy. We have also seen the largest expansion of our oil and gas industry east, west, and south of Williston due to the Bakken formation development. Again, Highway 2 has been a corridor that has facilitated the safe and efficient development of that resource play, without risking the lives of local citizens that also use the highway system for their transportation needs.

The relevance of where we stand today with the development of the Highway 85 Corridor reminds me of where we were in 1996, and I see great potential for another success story for infrastructure investment in North Dakota. As a Board Member of the Theodore Roosevelt Expressway Association, formed to promote infrastructure development on U.S. Highway 85, I have been acutely aware of both corridors and their potential. In comparing the corridors above, the one area of difference is the history of traffic we have that shows the already significant growth of industrial and commercial traffic on the Highway 85 Corridor. According to data provided by the North Dakota Department of Transportation, we have seen an increase in Truck Average Daily Traffic (ADT) from a testing location 5.1 miles north of Belfield, of approximately 100% from the period of 2004 to 2008. It is apparent from the data that exists that the corridor is already seeing growth higher than the rest of North Dakota, which indicates our traffic numbers on the corridor are also being raised by the transport of goods and services south and north of our corridor area. The development of our partner corridors, the Ports to Plains Corridor and the Heartland Expressway, are now impacting the Highway 85 system in North Dakota, which raises the significance of the infrastructure investment to a level of national importance. We see increasing movement of our agriculture commodities north and south of our corridor, as well as the majority of our equipment and production transportation related to oil and gas development at a time when we need to increase our domestic production capability to reduce our foreign oil dependency. Production of food and energy are critical to the strength and independence of our country, and this entire corridor is an infrastructure investment that makes sense to further promote that goal. Our partnership of three federally designated high priority corridors with nine states involved have significant national credibility at this time. Our nine states currently produce 14% of the total U.S. GDP, embrace seven of the top ten states for installed and potential wind energy with 45% of the U.S. total production already in place, produce and transport 22% (\$44.3 Billion) of United States agricultural goods, and contain 25% of the U.S. ethanol refining capacity. This is a corridor properly positioned for infrastructure investment to build upon the success already occurring. And as the statistics show, it is already a corridor with connections to transportation of a national significance.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and sincerely thank you, Senator Conrad, for your interest and involvement in such an important issue as infrastructure investment for the future of not only our State, but our Corridor and our Nation.

Submitted for testimony Thursday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in Williston, North Dakota