



February 18, 2020

Honorable Sen. Carolyn McGinn
Chairwoman, Senate Ways & Means Committee
Kansas Capitol Building, Room 548-S
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Chairwoman McGinn and members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee:

On behalf of the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce and our 565 member businesses, representing over 10,000 employees throughout Southeast Kansas, please allow me to voice our overwhelming support for SB 375, which will initiate the FORWARD transportation plan. Transportation is a key driver of the Kansas economy, and the FORWARD plan created by SB 375 will provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure our state remains attractive for business recruitment and expansion.

The importance of FORWARD is especially significant to those of us in east and southeast Kansas, as for too long, we've had to compete with neighboring communities along Interstate 49 in Missouri for economic development, job growth and new residents. A study conducted in 2010 showed that expanding four-lane access on Highway 69 alone would create over 4,000 new jobs and \$138 million in new annual wages right here in Kansas. The City of Pittsburg has invested heavily in its airport industrial park, which is located adjacent to the future four-lane Highway 69 corridor. We have land, utilities and a well-trained workforce....all that's missing now is four-lane highway access.

The \$88 million Kansas Crossing Casino & Hotel, the largest economic development project in Southeast Kansas in the last 30 years, chose its location at Highways 69 & 400 because the state has made expansion of these two transportation corridors a priority.

Pittsburg is also emerging as a regional medical hub for Southeast Kansas, with Ascension/Via Christi-Pittsburg operating one of only two level III trauma centers in the region. As Highway 69 is the principal north-south route for the hospital, the difference between a four-lane and two-lane highway truly is a matter of life or death.

FORWARD will also help enhance our state's rail industry, creating opportunities for companies like Watco that have called Pittsburg and Kansas home for almost 50 years.

It's for these and many other reasons that I encourage you to support SB 375.
Thank you for your consideration, as we work together to fuel the Kansas economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blake Benson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Blake Benson
President, Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce