



February 18, 2020

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce and our 1700+ business members, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in support of S.B. 375, AN ACT concerning transportation; providing for the FORWARD transportation program.

S.B. 375 would authorize and direct the Secretary of Transportation to initiate a Transportation Planning Program to plan, develop and operate or coordinate the development and operation of the various modes and systems of transportation in the state. The plan would provide for the construction, improvement, reconstruction and maintenance of the state highway system. The plan also would provide for the selection of projects, allowing for flexibility to meet emerging and economic needs.

Kansas has a proud history of providing for and maintaining a strong transportation system. The continuation and improvement of such system is vital to economic development and commerce within the state. In recognition of this fact, the Wichita Chamber has convened key private sector business members and local governments in the region to form the South Central Kansas Transportation Coalition to identify regionally significant transportation infrastructure needs.

We believe that a new comprehensive transportation plan is crucial to our continued success as a state. Communities across the state, including those in South Central Kansas, cannot afford to wait any longer for needed transportation investments. Having an empty or near-empty project pipeline puts Kansas at a disadvantage in recruiting and retaining businesses.

The dangerous and deadly North Junction in Sedgwick County best illustrates the significant transportation infrastructure needs in our state. This major confluence of where I-135, I-235, K-254, and K-96 meet in North Wichita is a mecca of congestion and deadly accidents. We certainly appreciate the Legislature's funding of the Cost Share program last year, which provided some dollars to the North Junction as well as a number of other projects around the state. However, the North Junction remains a critical need that will require additional investment.

While we believe it's important for the state to have a long-term plan, as shown by our support for this 10-year program, we also like the flexibility and agility FORWARD allows by picking projects on a two-year rolling basis. This allows the state to respond to emerging needs faster in the future, based on the changing economic climate. The City of Newton's cooperation with the state on returning dollars from a T-WORKS project they no longer needed is evidence of the benefits of



this flexibility. The more frequent local input consultation required by S.B. 375 is appreciated as well.

Of significant note is that FORWARD would provide additional assistance to cities and counties in meeting their responsibilities for the construction, improvement, reconstruction and maintenance of roads and bridges in cities that are located on the state highway system.

The Wichita Chamber also supports reasonable use of alternative delivery methods to deliver projects faster for communities. Our community has needs today, and the option to have some projects delivered faster is certainly beneficial.

We support the fact that FORWARD ensures that preservation of existing roads is prioritized and also includes allocations for technology buildout.

Finally, we would encourage the Legislature to continue the steps taken in recent years to reduce highway fund sweeps and move closer to ensuring that dedicated transportation funding streams are only used for the transportation program. While this bill will be helpful, we cannot make progress on transportation infrastructure without your support of appropriate funding to implement FORWARD.

The Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce stands in strong support of S.B. 375 for the reasons stated above and many more. We urge the Committee to report S.B. 375 favorable for passage.

Thank you Madame Chair and I will be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Very truly yours,

Jason P. Watkins
Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce

