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Transportation Investments: Promoting Economic Growth Along the US 52 and US 281 Corridors

July 9, 2010

Testimony of David Irmen representing North Dakota Bison Cooperative (NABC) and North Dakota Natural Beef, LLC (NDNB).

Thank you Senator Conrad and also thank you to your fellow committee members for holding this hearing today and for continuing discussion on the importance of U.S. Highway 52. and U.S Highway 281. My name is David Irmen and I work for and represent North American Bison Cooperative and North Dakota Natural Beef, LLC.

North American Bison Cooperative was established in 1993 and today harvests approximately 700 head of bison and cattle per week. We sell our products internationally and have sales in most states of the Union. North Dakota Natural Beef, LLC was established in 2007 and currently has Whole Foods Midwest as its major customer. We proudly represent our North Dakota Heritage in both our bison and beef products.

Many of you know, the NABC plant in New Rockford and the NDNB plant in Fargo are the largest beef and bison harvest and processing facilities in North Dakota. As such, they provide not only North Dakota feeders the ability to market their cattle and bison in North Dakota but also feeders from surrounding states and provinces of Canada. For every dollar in cattle and bison retained in North Dakota, \$4.50 of economic activity is generated for the state of North Dakota.

As major transportation routes, U.S Hwy 281 and U.S Hwy 52 are critical routes to NABC and NDNB. First they are the primary highways that are utilized to bring bison and beef animals to our plant in New Rockford, ND. U.S Hwy 52 is the main artery that is used by our bison and beef producers from the western regions of North Dakota, Montana, Saskatchewan and Alberta allowing them to bring their animals to the New Rockford plant on excellent highways and with greater speed than other routes. We currently have over 65 trucks per month delivering animals and another 50 plus trucks per month picking up at our New Rockford plant. That is 115 plus trucks per month using the highways.

Additionally, U.S Hwy 52 and U.S. Hwy 281 are the primary corridors that allow the New Rockford harvested animal carcasses to be transported to Fargo, ND. These highways are used daily by our trucks which a fellow employee and I personally drive every day. They are critical to the profitable and productive functioning of NABC and NDNB. The ability to count on the maintenance and functionality of these highways is critical to

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the operation of NABC and NDNB who combined will generate a sales revenue in excess of \$40,000,000 this year.

On a personal note, many of my friends and I rely on these highways for travel to and from shopping at grocery stores to clothing stores in Devil's Lake and Jamestown as well as using the recreational areas in Devil's Lake. To understand the impact of these highways for recreation, just count the number of commercial vehicles, hunters, motorcoaches, trailers, and fishing boats that travel this highway and you start to realize how critical these highways are to the state of North Dakota's economy. These highways are major arteries that are relied upon by literally thousands of people and businesses, not the least of which are the two companies I represent.

It is critical to the economy of this region and North Dakota that the roadway system supports consistent and reliable transportation for businesses. This requires a roadway system that is in good condition, has adequate capacity and is well-maintained, even in inclement weather. On a personal note, this makes my family feel much better when I am driving during the winter months and we know we can count on these highways being maintained.

As a taxpayer and local resident, I know that investments in the public roadway system support the economy through: 1) direct job creation through construction activities; 2) indirect and induced job support; and 3) productivity gains.

In summation, from both a personal and business perspective U.S Hwy 281 and U.S. Hwy 52 are critical to the success of our companies and to the success of this region of North Dakota to compete effectively. Driving these highways daily makes me appreciate the diversity of their use. I see farm machinery, buses, commercial trucks, tourists, and recreational vehicles every day. Without proper maintenance and continued support, this region would stand to lose business, tourism and farming revenue.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today for a highway system I depend on for my livelihood.

