

October 4, 2018

Senator Carolyn McGinn, Co-Chairperson
Representative Richard Proehl, Co-Chairperson
2018 Joint Legislative Transportation Vision Task Force
Room 68-West, Statehouse
300 SW Tenth Street
Topeka, KS 66612

RE: City of Newton Transportation Priorities

Dear Senator McGinn, Representative Proehl, and members of the Joint Legislative Task Force:

On behalf of the City of Newton, Kansas, City Commission we provide this letter of testimony to the 2018 Joint Legislative Task Force submitting key, priority transportation projects for our community, citizens, and industries. We appreciate the time and effort put forth by the members of the Task Force, traveling across the State, to gather this input directly from the stakeholders and partners.

Newton wishes to express support for other transportation projects in the South Central Kansas Region. The City is a member of the Blueprint for Regional Economic Growth (BREG) regional task force housed at the Greater Wichita Partnership (GWP), as well as being a member of the South Central Kansas Transportation task force organized by the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce. As you know, it is vitally important to maintain the quality and interconnection of our transportation system in order for our region and state to grow and remain competitive in the world of economic development. Should the quality and integrity of the system fail it will be detrimental to the State's economy. There continue to be many unmet needs in the 10 County South Central Kansas region that affect major cross-country thoroughfares.

The Newton City Commission respectfully submits the following projects and transportation priorities to the task force from the perspective of our portion of the regional transportation system.

A. Highway Initiatives:

1. **36th Street and I-135 Interchange** – This interchange is the entryway to our community, as well as being the designated truck/freight route to reach the Newton Industrial Park/Kansas Logistics Park. The reconstruction of this interchange is in all respects shovel-ready in that it has been designed, all necessary right-of-way has been acquired, and the City has committed to a local contribution to the project per our agreement with KDOT (Agreement No. 193-12); it was included in the original T-WORKS program as an approved project and needs to remain as such. This project is vital to the economic viability of the City's Industrial Parks for future growth and development. Specifics of this project include ramp widening, bridge improvements to accommodate 19-axle, large and heavy loads associated with the industrial park tenants and customers, as well as some aesthetic enhancements to the bridge. The use of this specific interchange for heavy commercial and industrial traffic will also improve safety by removing these oversized loads from other interchanges more suited for residential and low-volume commercial traffic.

2. **US-50 and Meridian Interchange** – This interchange is the oldest in Newton and probably one of the oldest remaining in the State. The ramps are not compliant with today’s highway standards or to the needs of current freight traffic and are unsafe. Very little to no lighting exists along the entrance and exit ramps, making them difficult to see and negotiate in low-light conditions. These safety issues compelled the State to reduce the speed limit on US-50 in this area to accommodate access to the highway and Meridian Road. This interchange is important to our local industries on the West side of Newton, including Mackey & Sons Inc., Lippert Components, Doric Vault, Mid Continent Cabinetry, Full Vision, and Pluswood (PWD) as their means of access to US-50 and then to I-135 to move freight and equipment.
3. **Continued US-50 Improvements** – US-50 should continue to be recognized as a major interstate and intrastate transportation link which carries a significant volume of freight traffic. Additionally, Highway 50 is a designated route for oversized loads and is heavily trafficked. Additionally, this road is heavily traveled during harvest time by large equipment and the movement of crops. A significant portion of this industrial traffic is between Newton and Hutchinson carrying materials, final products, and the employees who commute to and from the City’s industries and industrial parks. System and safety improvements throughout the length of US-50 in Kansas need to be continued so that it may safely and efficiently carry this traffic.

B. Local Transportation Funding Assistance Initiatives:

1. **Continuation of the Local Bridge Improvement Program** – The City of Newton and other local governments in Kansas rely on the KDOT Local Bridge Improvement program that provides funds to local jurisdictions to replace or rehabilitate locally-owned, deficient bridges in order to improve the overall transportation system. This program provided 90/10 matching funds to the local jurisdiction, with priority given to bridges that are structurally deficient, followed by those that are functionally obsolete. The City of Newton has 16 bridges that meet the criteria for eligibility for this program; one of those bridges has a sufficiency rating of 40 out of 100, and two of these bridges are rated in the 60’s.
2. **Funding Assistance for State Highway Improvements by Local Jurisdictions**– Newton is a proud partner with the State in the maintenance and upkeep of K-15 Highway. This road is also part of Newton’s downtown (Main Street). The City expresses support for continued maintenance dollars from KDOT in exchange for the City maintaining the portions of the highway located within the City limit. Additionally, the City supports the continuation of other funding programs that complement the maintenance funds, such as Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds.
3. **Federal Fund Exchange Dollars** – Strong support should be given to maintaining the current exchange rate at 90 cents on the dollar. In early 2018 there was a change by the State that reduced this rate to 75 cents, with that decision then being reversed by Governor Colyer. Keeping and maximizing the local benefit from this funding stream is vital to maintaining existing infrastructure in cities and counties.

C. Rail Initiatives:

1. **Passenger Rail** – Newton continues to express emphatic and unanimous support for continued development of passenger rail service and potential state funding for operation and expansion of the service. Recently the Kansas Federal delegation has taken public steps to support the continuation of the Southwest Chief line, as well as expansion of the Heartland Flyer line, expanding service from Ft. Worth, through Oklahoma City, Wichita, and Newton. Senator Jerry Moran has been particularly outspoken in support of this initiative, including adding an amendment to the federal transportation bill that will require AMTRAK to dedicate \$50 million of existing funding to track improvements in several states as well as provide the previously-dedicated \$3 million in matching funds from a successful 2018 TIGER grant written by the multi-state coalition. Newton remains poised to become a major Amtrak interchange for north, south, east, and west passenger rail service in the U.S. The impact of these visitors traveling into a large part of our State should not be underestimated.
2. **Rail Service Improvement Funds** – Extension of rail lines into the Newton Industrial Park/Kansas Logistics Park continues to be important for the growth and expansion of industries and the Industrial Parks. Newton currently has two BNSF Certified Sites and access to additional funds for rail extension as promised by KDOT over the past five years remains instrumental in recruiting businesses and industries to Newton, to South Central Kansas and to our State.

D. Local Initiatives and Transportation Enhancement Projects:

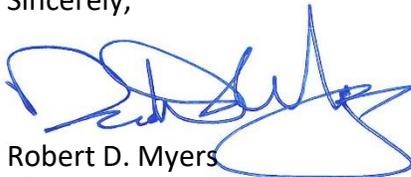
1. **Airport Funding** – Newton supports the creation and adoption of a new multi-year, multi-modal transportation plan to replace the expiring T-Works program, the Kansas Airport Improvement Program (KAIP), with the inclusion of funding specific to airport infrastructure. Municipal airports are dependent on funding from KDOT and the FAA to make large-scale improvements and maintenance to runways and taxiways. In 2016 KDOT conducted an Aviation Economic Impact Study that showed the Newton City/County Airport (MetroNorth) and the industries located at the adjacent industrial park employ over 750 people with an annual total payroll over \$28.2 million. The economic output for these industries and the airport tops \$152.7 million annually.

Airports in Kansas provide benefits beyond those directly associated with on-airport businesses or aviation and are more qualitative in nature. Because these benefits typically enhance the health, safety, or welfare of individuals in the airport's market area, they cannot be readily assigned a dollar value. Some examples of these benefits include medical operations such as patient transfers and medical air cargo; agricultural applications; off-airport aerospace manufacturing; support of law enforcement operations, military training and exercises, search and rescue operations; aerial surveying and inspection; and flight training.

2. **Transportation Alternatives (TA) Programs** – The supports the continuation of the TA programs, including construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, projects that enhance safety and mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists, and those that improve scenic or environmental assets in Kansas. The City has utilized these funds in trails projects and for Safe Routes to School initiatives.
3. **Economic Development Programs** – The City supports the continuation of KDOT’s economic development programs, including the **Transportation Economic Development Loan Program (TEDL)** that provides loans for transportation projects which have a direct tie to economic growth, and including the **Transportation Revolving Fund (TRF)**.
4. **Geometric Improvement Program (GI)** – The City supports the continuation of the GI program, which provides funding toward improvements in intersections, widening narrow roadways, adding lanes, storm sewers, and curb and guttering.
5. **Safety** – Strong support should be given to safety programs and improvements such as intersection and signalization, roundabouts, turning lanes, and traffic studies. In the past these programs have been funded on a two-year cycle in partnership with KDOT and the US Department of Transportation.
6. **Access Management** – The City of Newton continues to advocate for access management funding and support. This program helps communities plan for growth and future access along state highways. For Newton, this program specifically applies to I-135 and U.S. 50, as well as K-15.

The City of Newton again thanks the Task Force for their time and expertise, and for the opportunity to be the host site of the October 4th meeting.

Sincerely,



Robert D. Myers
City Manager & Senior Legal Counsel