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The Honorable Senator Carolyn McGinn and The Honorable Representative Richard Proehl
Co-Chairs of The Transportation Vision Task Force

Good Afternoon Co-Chairs McGinn and Proehl and Members of the Task Force:

Thank you for this opportunity to address you regarding Kansas transportation needs. Although our family is originally from Pennsylvania, three of my four siblings have lived on Iowa Street in Pratt, Kansas at one time or other. I first came to Pratt for a visit in the summer of 1970. My brother and his family picked me up at the Wichita Airport and I remember a lot of windshield time that night. We were, of course, traveling west on Highway 54. My brother informed me that the State of Kansas had been studying the possibility of constructing Highway 54 into a four-lane highway because of its importance to the movement of commodities. U.S. Route 54/400 is an east-west highway that runs northeast-southwest for 1,197 miles from Griggsville, Illinois to El Paso, Texas.

In 1995, two gentlemen from Liberal, Kansas, Max Zimmerman and Jack Taylor formed S.P.I.R.I.T (Southwest Passage Initiative for Regional and Interstate Transportation), a coalition of communities along Highway 54 representing Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico (and eight United States Senators) in an effort to coordinate four-lane expansion from Wichita to El Paso, Texas to spur economic development, along with expediting freight more safely and timely. Although the original founders have passed away, this coalition continues to lobby Congress and the respective state legislatures for funding.

Pratt County has been waiting for the construction of a by-pass around the City of Pratt, along with the completion of the four-lane highway throughout the entire length of the county. Since 1970, many lives have been lost on Highway 54 in Pratt County due to the increased traffic load, especially with semi-trucks hauling the various agricultural commodities grown in Pratt County, along with consumer products, wind turbine components, industrial manufactured goods and a tremendous number of over-sized truck loads for a major portion of the country. Approximately 7,000 heavy trucks travel through the city limits of Pratt every day because of the three major highways, U.S. 54 and 281, along with KS 61. We have been in a holding pattern for years, waiting for the by-pass to be built.

The small town of Cunningham, just inside the western border of Kingman County, was by-passed in the last T-Works Program. Many feared that the by-pass would be the death knell of the town, but the complete opposite occurred! Skyland Grain built a large grain storage facility, several small manufacturers located there, and a very large Love's Truck stop was built adjacent to the by-pass. It proves that a town can experience growth with new business building from the original border to the by-pass for visibility and location.

Four-lane roads are the lifeblood of economy. South Central and South West Kansas have been stymied in their growth due to the lack of four lane transportation. The right-of-way was acquired in Pratt County during the last T-Works Program. The City of Pratt and Pratt County are requesting that a by-pass around Pratt be constructed in this next transportation plan. We have felt that we have been "put on hold" for over 50 years. We are always waiting for the next transportation plan to address our needs. Our primary goal is to remain a vital community and county, promoting safety and expansion.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Task Force.