

Testimony for Joint Legislative Transportation Vision Task Force

October 4, 2018, Meridian Center, 1420 E. Broadway Ct., Newton, KS 67114

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My name is Margaret Goering and I am here today to testify on behalf of the Harvey County Food and Farm Council. We are tasked with improving access to locally grown, healthy food; developing strategies to ensure community residents are able to obtain safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system; and to provide a forum to bring together stakeholders to improve access to local food, examine how food systems operate and to develop solutions to improve the food system. While our focus is limited to Harvey County, we are not unique in Kansas in the issues we have discovered for people accessing healthy foods and for our growers to distribute their products.

Harvey County conducts a Community Health Needs Assessment every three years. The assessment, completed last year identified three main priorities: 1. Improve Well-being/Mental Health/Behavioral Health; 2. Prevent and Manage Chronic Disease; 3. Develop Viable Transportation Options for Health Needs.<sup>1</sup> Chronic disease and transportation both impact the purpose of the Harvey County Food and Farm Council.

Part of preventing chronic diseases, such as diabetes or heart disease, is improving diet. Improving diet includes increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables. A person cannot increase consumption of fruits and vegetables if they cannot access them. Harvey County does not, by definition, have a food desert, but of our 7 municipalities, only 2 have full service grocery stores. If you reside in one of the 5 towns without, you may have a convenience store, but otherwise, you must travel to purchase groceries. Transportation, therefore, becomes a major contributor to the prevention of chronic diseases, as there is no scheduled public transit system reaching the entire county.

Transportation should serve the needs of PEOPLE. Transportation modes make sure people can get to the grocery store (or work, or their doctor's appointments) whether they are getting there in a car, a bus, on a bike, in a wheelchair, or on foot. Kansas must continue to sustain, and expand, alternative transportation projects that support programs for people, such as such as our Harvey County Interurban Bus program and the walking/biking trail expansion in North Newton.

Transportation should also serve the needs of the people growing produce for sale to our residents. Kansas must continue to support the maintenance and safety of our highway and rail system so producers can get their crops from the field to the markets, and thus to the tables of the people of

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.harveycounty.com/images/Health%20Department/FINAL%20Community%20Health%20NEEDS%20Assessment%202017%20-.pdf>

Kansas and the world. In Harvey County, more than 4000 people are in agriculture or processing careers; agriculture and processing contributes more than \$1 billion to the Harvey County economy<sup>2</sup>.

However, while maintaining and growing our highway and rail system, I ask that you remember that highways and railroads can also be barriers. People travel not only along highways, but across them. Newton is a perfect example of the divisions that can occur due to highway construction and railroads. As an example, let's imagine a mother with no car, yet has a child in a stroller. She walks from the housing area located behind the Meridian Center where we are meeting to the nearest grocery store. There are two routes under I-135 which is located between here and Dillons. The most direct route includes crossing the BNSF line on a collector road with no sidewalk and is an hour or more round trip (not including shopping). Walking to the store on the route with sidewalks adds another 40 minutes to your grocery shopping trip. And that is if you live here in Newton with several grocery store options.

When considering your strategies for our transportation needs in Kansas, we ask that you keep in mind that our roads, highways, rail - they are all to serve the needs of people. People with cars and without. People driving tractor-trailers and riding bicycles. People on foot and in wheel chairs. All people. And to remember that transportation is a matter of health.

We need safe, dependable, means for PEOPLE to transverse our major transportation routes that we need to move goods and commerce. We need to make sure that the mother living behind this building can either walk safely to the grocery store or has a public transportation service she can use to access healthy food for her family. Food that was delivered to the stores by the growers here in Kansas via our highways and rails.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://agriculture.ks.gov/economic-development-statistics/county-statistics-\(a-h\)/harvey-county](http://agriculture.ks.gov/economic-development-statistics/county-statistics-(a-h)/harvey-county)