

Presentation to the Joint Legislative Transportation Vision Task Force

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Harvey County Commissioner George “Chip” Westfall

Email: chipw58@cox.net Phone: 316-284-6806

TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES FOR HARVEY COUNTY

North US-50 and I-135 Interchange – Harvey County supports a project to allow traffic driving westbound on US-50 to travel directly onto northbound I-135, and southbound I-135 to travel directly onto eastbound US-50. Two of Harvey County’s largest businesses, AGCO and Excel Industries, would benefit from this improvement. Currently, trucks coming and going from these businesses must travel to and exit at the Broadway and I-135 interchange, go around a roundabout and then enter back onto I-135 toward their destination. In doing so, time and miles are added to their trips, which ultimately decrease their efficiency.

US-50 and Meridian Interchange – This interchange is important to our local industries on the west side of Newton, as it is their access point to US-50 and then to I-135. The interchange is the oldest in Newton, and the ramps are not compliant with today’s standards or to the needs of current freight traffic. As a result of these safety issues, the State has reduced the speed limit on US-50 in this area to accommodate access between the highway and Meridian.

36th St. and I-135 Interchange – This interchange is the designated truck/freight route to reach the Kansas Logistics Park and the Newton Industrial Park. The reconstruction of this interchange is shovel-ready, as it has been designed, all necessary rights of way have been acquired, and the City of Newton has made a local contribution to the project. This project was approved in the original T-WORKS program, and Harvey County requests the project be completed as planned.

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 through not only Harvey County, but the entire State. Additional safety improvements need to be considered throughout the entire length of US-50 in Kansas.

Regional Projects – Harvey County supports projects requested by our partners in the nine-county South Central Kansas region. One project that would be especially beneficial to Harvey County is the North Junction project in Wichita.

Federal Fund Exchange Dollars – Strong support should be given to maintaining the current exchange rate at 90 cents on the dollar. This funding stream is vital for local governments to continue to maintain our extensive road and bridge infrastructure.

Rail Dollars – Extension of rail lines into the Kansas Logistics Park and Newton Industrial Park continues to be important for the growth and expansion of industries in Harvey County. The City of Newton 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 Harvey County, to South Central Kansas, and to our state.

Special City/County Highway Fund – Harvey County is appreciative for the funding it receives through the Special City/County Highway Fund, which are basically from state gas tax. The current distribution for state motor fuel tax is that 66.37 percent goes to the State Highway Fund and 33.63 percent goes to the cities and counties. Although 57 percent of the vehicle miles traveled are on city streets and county roads, local governments only receive 33.63 percent of the gas tax. Gas tax is a user tax and gas consumed driving city streets and county roads should go to the cities and counties. Harvey County is opposed to any reduction in the percentage of gas tax that goes to the Special City and County Highway Fund. Additionally, motor carrier property tax is supposed to go to counties and cities through the Special City and County Highway Fund, but since 2005 it has been diverted to the State General Fund (about \$10 million annually).

Airport Dollars – Harvey County requests KDOT continue to include funding for airport projects in its budget. Municipal airports, like the Newton City/County Airport, are dependent on funding from KDOT and the FAA for large-scale improvements and maintenance on runways and taxiways.

Passenger Rail Service – Harvey County supports funding for passenger rail services. Harvey County is excited for Newton to become a major Amtrak interchange for north, south, east, and west passenger rail service in the United States through the Southwest Chief and the Heartland Flyer lines.

Funding for Rural Road System – Kansas counties and townships maintain 115,000 miles of road, compared to KDOT's 10,200 miles of roadway. While state highways have been highly rated nationally, counties have been struggling to maintain passable roads. While truck traffic has been increasing as agricultural production has increased, eighty-eight counties are decreasing in population, which impacts the tax base available to maintain and improve these rural roads. Every trip begins and ends on a local road, and almost all agricultural production utilizes local roads to reach state highways. Harvey County supports increased funding for the rural road system in Kansas' next highway bill.

Local Bridges – Counties, including Harvey County, need assistance in repairing deficient bridges. Harvey County has 280 bridges. While Harvey County has been proactive in replacing bridges that are deteriorating, due to the high cost of bridge construction, we are unable to replace large bridges at a sustainable rate. Statewide, counties are replacing an average of 115 bridges per year. At that rate, counties across Kansas will be faced with closing half of their bridges over the next 50 years if a sustainable replacement program is not developed and funded.

Modern Highway System – Harvey County supports a modern highway system, as a good network of state highways is essential for rural and urban Kansas. Modernization is needed on many highways to reduce accidents and fatalities. About 3,000 miles of state highway do not have shoulders, representing a major safety issue with inattentive driving, wide farm equipment, avoiding errant vehicles, and few locations to park for repairs.

Federal Funding Shared Locally – The State of Kansas received approximately \$258 million in federal funding, but only \$60 million (23 percent) goes to local governments even though 57 percent of vehicle miles are traveled on the local road system. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the counties received 50 percent of Kansas’ federal funds to improve secondary roads. Over time that requirement was lowered, and in the last few federal highway bills there has not been a requirement to distribute funds to local government. It seems the amount of federal funds going to locals is frozen at a historically low percentage.

Future Funding – Current funding methods will not support the rural road network in its current form. Statewide the county funding is 21 percent from Special City/County Highway Fund, 7 percent from federal funds exchange, and 71 percent from property tax. With the current tax lid, counties have less flexibility to increase funding for road and bridge improvements. Additionally, property tax is inherently an unfair way to fund roads, as about 70 percent of property tax to fund rural roads originates from city property. In the future, we need to consider new revenue streams that more equitably fund the rural road network.