

**Testimony for HB 2172 | February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025**  
**Presented to House Agriculture and Natural Resources**

Presented by

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Chairman Rahjes and Members of the Committee,

Over the course of 2018, former Representative Rich Proehl and I had the honor to serve as Co-Chairs of the Joint Legislative Transportation Vision Task Force. This Task Force was authorized by the passage of H Sub for Senate Bill 391 in 2018 with a report due prior to the beginning of the next legislative session.

Based on our experience, the Kansas Transportation Task Force was invaluable in engaging people across the state and aid us in developing a plan to address the transportation issues and ensure safety and economic benefits for our communities and state. We believe HB 2172 will also assist legislators in developing a water plan that works for Kansans and ensure that state and local communities are able to secure access to safe water resources for all citizens of the state of Kansas.

The goals of this the Transportation Task Force included the following:

- Evaluating the current state transportation system.
- Soliciting local input on existing uncompleted projects and future projects.
- Evaluating the uses of the State Highway Fund (SHF) and transfers from the SHF for other purposes.
- Evaluating the sufficiency of transportation funding.
- Identifying additional transportation projects with a direct impact on the economic health of the state and its residents.
- Making recommendations for the transportation system over the next ten years and beyond.
- Making recommendations on the structure of the SHF and the maintenance of the state infrastructure system; and,
- Report to the Legislature by January 31, 2019.

While the state of Kansas's transportation system has benefited immensely from successive 10-year plans now for several generations, the state's water system has not necessarily had the same long-term planning or resources dedicated to it over the state's history. The Legislature took a significant step forward with the passage of 2022 House Bill 2302; however, more work needs to be done to ensure that the state is investing resources in vetted and effective programs that will lead to long-term water security.

This investment is critical for our state's most important industries, chief among them, agriculture. It is also important that we have a plan for maintaining and protecting our access to safe drinking water, whether it comes from the aquifer or one of our reservoirs or rivers. Each of these priorities, for industry and people, must be balanced, like the many priorities of the state transportation system.

Based on what the Transportation Vision Task Force examined, we would recommend that the Task Force consider the following issues:

- The best structure for the state to deliver water programs so that it is transparent and accountable to the public.
- The source of funding for water in the state of Kansas and the sustainability and efficacy of that source of funding.
- Non-fiscal measures that the state should consider to secure access to clean water.
- A system for drawing down federal funding opportunities that advance state goals.
- How to match state funding with private and local funding to secure water.
- The state's economic needs as it relates to water, and the impact to the state if water is not available for economic or population sustainability or growth.
- Non-fiscal partnerships with industry to advance water saving technology and reuse.
- The impact that access to water has for individual Kansans—municipal, agricultural, industrial, and recreational.
- Any reforms to the state's water planning process to promote short-term and long-term planning goals.
- An effective timeframe for reevaluating state investments and programs, in addition to the yearly work of standing committees with jurisdiction.

Ultimately, it will be up to the Task Force to determine where it focuses its energy and time, however it is important that this be done prior to the need to reauthorize House Bill 2302 so that the Legislature is informed and ready to make decisions on the state's investment strategy, funding structure and source of funding, and organizational structure.

The Task Force structure not only ensures that key legislators are at the table, but that key stakeholder positions are represented and invested in the success of programs throughout the state. For us, it was key that we heard from members of the public, businesses, and local governments throughout the state on what their local transportation needs were and how the state could be an effective partner. The same is true for water.

Because of the diversity of where we get our water and rainfall differences, we need to ensure that a state-wide program honors the unique regional water needs across Kansas, allowing all areas of the state to be heard and supported.

While House Bill 2302 has enabled investments that were only dreamed of 10 years ago, it is essential that the state continue to catalog successful programs and the impacts that they have or else we risk seeing another decline in funding in all areas—including water—once we have another recession or unbalanced balance sheet.

Kansas has a state highway and transportation system that is the envy of states around us. That system of highways and transportation infrastructure did not happen overnight, and it is only through sustained planning and investment that we came to this point. Please give strong consideration to House Bill 2172 and we encourage you to take on the challenge of making our water administration and project delivery as efficient as our state's transportation system.