

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Proponent Oral Testimony on HB 2172

Julie Lorenz

Former Secretary of the Kansas Department of Transportation

February 10, 2025

Charman Rahjes and members of the committee: Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of **HB 2172**.

I am Julie Lorenz, former Secretary of the Kansas Department of Transportation. I had the good fortune to facilitate the 2018 Legislative Transportation Taskforce which set the framework for the passage of the 2020 IKE Transportation Program with 94 percent support from both sides of the aisle.

Kansas benefits from 40 years of steady transportation programs, developed through local input, agency expertise and legislative direction:

- **Comprehensive Highway Program 1991 – 1999**

Initiated by Governor Hayden, worked by the Highway Task Force and a special legislative session, the CHP vastly improved highway infrastructure. Prior to this program only 49% of roads in Kansas were in good condition

- **Comprehensive Transportation Program 2000 – 2009**

The T-2000 taskforce led development of the program. Signed by Governor Graves, this program expanded the highway system and added funding for transit, aviation and rail.

- **T-WORKS 2010 – 2019**

The T-LINK task force, called by Governor Sebelius, emphasized economic impact and local input; with legislative work being conducted through the 2009 special committee on new transportation plan holding hearings across the state to assess need for new plan; 2008 Joint committee on Economic development studying the economic impact of transportation projects; and the 2009 Special committee on Transportation studying options for additional funding for transportation. The \$8 million promise for each county was designed and delivered during this decade. Signed by Governor Parkinson.

- **Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Program (IKE) 2020 – 2029**

2018 Legislative Vision Task Force, called by Governor Colyer, traveled the state to learn about project needs and how to structure new programs like cost share and create a more nimble approach to delivering projects instead of the 10-year set list of projects. KDOT then spent another year gathering input to develop the rolling program, including the development and construction pipelines and continuation of the \$8 million promise. Signed by Governor Kelly.

I share this history to show the diligence and effort it takes to create a statewide infrastructure program.

I now serve as the lead consultant in developing the recently approved Implementation Framework for the Kansas 2022 Water Plan, based on input from two rounds of local consult meetings where we heard from more than 1,500 Kansans.

Significant work has been done to get us to the point of considering how we, as a State, can move from this Framework to the real – and really hard – discussion of structuring and funding a 10-year rolling water program so Kansans and our economy can benefit from a long-term, sustainable program that has enough flexibility to improve programs when needed, enough engagement to address specific regional needs and enough transparency so that Kansans can track whether their tax dollars are being used wisely.

Yes, lots of work – and lots of talk – has occurred with previous water task forces, blue ribbon panels and others. But there are several differences this time which bode well for a better water future:

- 1) Specific outcomes and performance levels have already been linked to investment levels in the Implementation Framework so legislators can weigh the value of investing in our most pressing water problems located in aquifers, reservoirs and water quality;
- 2) There's a great sense of urgency with more than 100 communities facing less than a 25-year supply of clean water which threatens their way of life and economy – and frankly, the broader Kansas economy;
- 3) While there's a bold vision for providing 50-year water supply across the state, just as importantly, Kansans have very practically said a 2-year ramp up period is needed before significantly more dollars are invested in water programs;
- 4) There's great momentum coming from recent legislative efforts to invest in water programs and concern that those investments sunset in a couple of years. Kansans were overwhelmingly supportive of a long-term, increased investment in water. However, they don't have the ability to establish the dedicated, consistent funding structure needed to bring it to fruition which is why a legislative taskforce is needed to propel this momentum into an actionable, funded program.
- 5) And finally, there is a growing recognition through the local consult efforts that there are water problems across our state – not just in the west or in the east in our reservoirs. Kansans across the state have also been clear they would like to see projects that get the biggest bang for our tax dollars through local, state, federal and even private partnerships - but they can't design those alone. Like KDOT's Local Consult process, the taskforce can help craft the support and structure necessary for a pipeline process that prioritizes projects that make the best long-term investments while also ensuring geographic balance.

Just as the Wichita Eagle stated in 1989, “the Highway Plan has changed people's lives forever in southeastern Kansas,” now you have the great fortune – at this moment in time – to set the future water course for our state by authorizing a legislative taskforce to consider dedicated revenue sources, what the definition of a 50 year water supply means in Kansas and – most importantly – how we, as Kansas, will work together so that our children and our grandchildren have the same opportunities we have enjoyed.

Honestly, I hope in 2065 Kansans will look back at this moment and reference the foresight of creating the first 10-year water program that goes on to serve as a 40-year model for other state programs.

Thank you.