

Date: February 18, 2020
To: Chairperson Carolyn McGinn and the Senate Committee on Ways and Means
From: Mayor Carl Gerlach, City of Overland Park
Re: Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 375

Thank you for allowing the City of Overland Park to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 375 to initiate the FORWARD transportation program to provide for the construction, improvement, reconstruction and maintenance of the state highway system.

Transportation infrastructure provides the foundation for economic vitality. It attracts development, increases property values, creates jobs, connects people to needs, reduces travel costs, improves freight access, improves reliability and much more.

A prime example in Overland Park is the US 69 corridor. It provides efficient access to jobs, customers and materials and is a contributing reason that people live in our city. Also, its ability to move people and goods at a low cost and within a reasonable commute time is a major reason that attracts businesses to Overland Park.

US 69 is the backbone of Overland Park's transportation network and an economic powerhouse regionally and for the state. It generates more than \$6.9 billion in economic activity, generating local and state jobs, growth and tax revenue. This is driven by more than 10,000 businesses in Overland Park, including many of the largest employers in Kansas. Collectively, those advantages help explain why the corridor is helping drive more than \$500 million a year in private investment in Overland Park and attracting more than 1,000 new residents to the city each year.

However, today we face different challenges. The corridor's positive regional and statewide economic impact is threatened by congestion and deterioration. Our population is projected to grow by one-third and local employment expected to grow by more than 51,000 jobs by 2040. Traffic volumes are projected to double and travel times triple in this timeframe.

Widening US 69, south of I-435 is Overland Park's number one transportation priority and we are proactively doing what we can to fix this critical corridor. The importance of that transportation node strengthens our close partnership with KDOT as we remain focused on developing a US 69 solution. In the last 20 years, Overland Park has invested \$61 million in US 69 related improvements in conjunction with KDOT.

But Overland Park needs a strong partnership with the State of Kansas to make sure US 69 remains a major contributor to the regional and state economies. It is vital to implement transportation strategies and investments that contribute to maintaining our economic vitality.

FORWARD was developed with a sharpened focus on the transportation needs of Kansas communities. First and foremost, the development of this program centered on inclusive engagement in consultation with Kansans through an advisory group, local consults and online surveys to gather public input. Our city remains an active participant in that process. As part of the advisory group convened to provide high level strategic insight, I witnessed firsthand the development of a transportation program that allows KDOT to make the right investments, in the right place, at the right time.

FORWARD incorporates better business practices - developing a business plan rather than a government plan. For a business to succeed, it needs to constantly adjust in accordance with the marketplace, double down on what works and eliminate what doesn't. FORWARD acknowledges that the pace of change is accelerating, and today's transportation needs require flexibility, responsiveness, problem solving, practical solutions and the ability to leverage local monetary participation.

We must also be able to work at the speed of business to deliver the transportation needs that Kansans expect. FORWARD will allow KDOT to identify needs, deliver the best results, and invest strategically. That is why the rolling program where major projects are selected every two years instead of once a decade is an important new component that allows communities and KDOT to respond to emerging needs and opportunities faster. In addition, local consult and project selection every two years keeps communities engaged and looking to the future in order to identify practical steps to rapidly solve problems.

And speaking of faster, we cannot have citizens sitting in traffic, for almost 5 million hours in one year, like on US 69, waiting for KDOT to deliver a project due to outdated business practices. If FORWARD envisions communities bringing more money to the table, then communities have the right to expect projects to be delivered faster. Thus, we support alternative delivery authority for projects that are large, complex and time-sensitive or have an economic development component. Overland Park has successfully utilized alternative delivery methods on several projects over the years and we can attest to the benefit these practices provide.

Overland Park has benefitted from transportation investments - certainly highways, but also transit and aviation investments. We remain exceptional financial partners with the state.

The time to pass FORWARD is NOW. Have you seen I-435 and I-35? Our highways are crumbling in many places and congestion is choking our growth. Trust needs to be restored and we need to know how transportation will work in Kansas for the next 10 years.

We strongly support FORWARD and ask for favorable passage out of committee. We look forward to working with the State and KDOT to deliver a strong future for all Kansans.



Carl Gerlach
Mayor