February 10, 2026

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2607, AN ACT designating the official Kansas railroad hall of fame for the purpose of celebrating the rich railroad heritage of Kansas and the Kansans who were and are leaders in such industry; setting the location of such hall of fame at the great plains transportation museum in Wichita; establishing the Kansas railroad hall of fame selection committee; prescribing powers and duties of the committee.

The Wichita Regional Chamber represents thousands of employers across south-central Kansas, and we strongly support efforts that preserve Kansas history while also strengthening economic development, tourism, and workforce pride. HB 2607 accomplishes all three.

Kansas railroads played a foundational role in the growth of our state—connecting rural communities to national markets, supporting agriculture and manufacturing, and positioning Kansas as a transportation crossroads. That legacy is not merely historical; rail transportation continues to move a significant share of goods through Kansas today and remains essential to our modern economy. Establishing an official Kansas Railroad Hall of Fame recognizes this enduring contribution and honors the Kansans whose leadership shaped and sustained the industry.

The Great Plains Transportation Museum in Wichita is an ideal and logical location for this designation. The museum already has a proven mission focused on transportation history, established facilities, and experience hosting educational programming and visitors. Locating the Hall of Fame in Wichita leverages existing infrastructure and creates natural synergies, allowing the state to maximize impact without duplicating resources.

From an economic perspective, the Hall of Fame will enhance tourism and visitation, drawing rail enthusiasts, historians, educators, and families from across Kansas and beyond. Increased visitation supports local hotels, restaurants, and small businesses while reinforcing Wichita's role as a regional destination for history, culture, and innovation. This type of heritage tourism provides long-term value with minimal fiscal impact on the state.

The governance structure outlined in HB 2607 is also sound. The selection committee is balanced, transparent, and inclusive of industry expertise, public representation, and historical stewardship. The bill emphasizes private fundraising, donations, and partnerships, ensuring the Hall of Fame can be sustained without reliance on ongoing state appropriations.

HB 2607 is a thoughtful, forward-looking bill that celebrates Kansas's past while supporting economic and cultural vitality in the present. On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce, we respectfully urge the Committee to support HB 2607.

Very truly yours,

Jason P. Watkins