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**SEWARD COUNTY SALES TAX REQUEST
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE TAXATION COMMITTEE
ON NEEDS IN ROAD & BRIDGE
APRIL WARDEN, SEWARD COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
JANUARY 21, 2025**

Chairman Smith and Members of the House Taxation Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of Seward County Kansas, in regards to our request for a half cent sales tax to help with the needs the County has identified in Road & Bridge.

Initial construction of roads in Seward County were not built to handle the excessive traffic, heavy trucks, large equipment, and overall higher demand of use that we are now experiencing. Many of the roads were built before the safety standards of today. Technology and Economic Development have come a long way and we are extremely thankful for what the future holds in Seward County, but Seward County has a great need for the rehabilitation of our roads and transportation system.

Energy and agriculture are the main economic drivers of our area. Seward County is home to National Beef Packing, National Carriers, Arkalon Ethanol Plant, Conestoga, Cotton Warehouse, DCP National Helium, Groendyke Transport, Air Products, Sunflower Electric, Keating Tractor, Heifer Source, Seaboard, multiple dairies, feedlots, and many family farms.

Seward County is also home to Southwestern Heights, USD483, a rural school system, in which many young drivers and school buses utilize our County roads to and from school and activities.

Recognizing our roads are crucial to our continued growth and safety for our citizens, we have done a complete assessment and core sampling of our 137 miles of asphalt roads, and evaluated the issues of rutting, washboards, potholes, loose aggregate, dust control, drainage, crowning, gravel quality and new culverts needed on the 446 gravel and 100 miles of earth dirt roads in Seward County. Seward County has a total of 683 miles of roads.

Seward County has hired Kirkham Michael, Civil Engineering Firm, to help assist us in reviewing our roads; both gravel and asphalt, develop a five- and ten-year plan, field

review and roadway design. They have helped us obtain grant opportunities, develop bid documents, and structural design for a replacement bridge.

Seward County has struggled to maintain our County Roads. Due to budget constraints, inflation of materials, fuel, parts, equipment and workforce issues, a large fraction of our roads have deteriorated. Improvement has involved a several step process including funding of repairs, maintenance and upkeep in the short-term and the long-term.

The Board of Seward County Commissioners have had several strategic planning sessions where they have considered what we have in reserves, asking themselves if a mill levy increase is necessary (following the revenue neutral rate process), a bond issue, sales tax increase, and what services can be cut. We have of course been applying for grants and received an HRRR and Cost-Share Grant for two projects.

The Commission has held quarterly town hall meetings and heard the public speak loud and clear about their property taxes and how they are not in favor of a mill levy increase but have expectations of roads that can be traveled for work, transporting goods and services, access to health care, school systems, and of course tourists and consumers that visit our community.

The resources available at city/county/state level are very limited so our ask of the taxation committee is to please pass HB2004 allowing Seward County the opportunity to go to our community for consideration in voting for a half cent sales tax to help with the cost of repairing, maintaining and sustaining our roadways in Seward County.

Thank you for your time and listening to our needs in Seward County, Kansas.