

**Road and Bridge Department
Engineering Division**
3424 Airport Road
Salina, Ks 67401
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Justin L. Mader, P.E.
County Engineer

February 3, 2025

Re: Senate Bill No. 57
Committee on Utilities

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Saline County, I submit this testimony in strong opposition to Senate Bill 57.

Financial Burden on Local Governments

SB 57 mandates that KDOT, counties, cities, and other political subdivisions bear the cost of relocating communication and utility infrastructure for highway projects. This would create a significant unfunded mandate, straining county budgets that are already stretched thin. Transportation infrastructure projects often involve moving telecommunications lines, broadband cables, and other facilities. Requiring counties to cover these costs diverts essential funds away from road projects, maintenance, public safety, and other critical services.

Unfair Cost-Shifting to Taxpayers

Historically, the cost of relocating private infrastructure has been the responsibility of the utility or telecommunications provider, as they benefit from using public rights-of-way. Shifting this responsibility onto counties forces local taxpayers to subsidize private companies. This is an inequitable use of public funds and places an undue burden on Kansas residents.

Conflicts with Road Maintenance and Construction

Utility companies often install their infrastructure within public road right-of-way at the cheapest cost and with little oversight during construction. This practice can lead to improperly placed or inadequately buried lines, which later conflict with road maintenance and expansion projects. Counties are frequently forced to work around or address these issues, adding unexpected costs and delays to necessary infrastructure improvements. Instead of reinforcing this flawed approach, SB 57 would reward poor planning by making taxpayers responsible for resolving these conflicts—conflicts that utilities themselves create by placing their infrastructure in the public right-of-way without considering long-term roadway needs.

Disruptions to Infrastructure Planning

Counties carefully plan road and highway projects within budget constraints. By forcing local governments to cover relocation costs, SB 57 introduces financial uncertainty, potentially delaying or even halting necessary infrastructure improvements. Rural counties, in particular, will struggle to absorb these additional costs, leading to deteriorating road conditions and hampered economic development.

Lack of Local Control

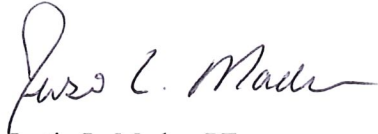
This legislation strips counties of their ability to negotiate cost-sharing agreements with utility providers. Current processes allow for collaboration between local governments and private entities to fairly distribute relocation costs. By imposing a blanket reimbursement requirement, SB 57 removes this flexibility and increases administrative burdens on counties.

Conclusion

SB 57 represents an unfunded mandate that will harm local governments, increase taxpayer costs, and disrupt essential infrastructure projects. We urge the committee to reject this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Justin L. Mader". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Justin L. Mader, PE
Saline County Engineer