

Major Themes

The Transportation 2000 Study Group Heard

- ◆ *Testimony given reflected transportation concerns of people from all walks of life and all regions of the state.*
- ◆ *Those testifying were pleased with the Comprehensive Highway Program (CHP) and wanted to build on its success.*
- ◆ *The public was clear that it wanted improvements for highways, aviation, public transit, and rail.*

Testimony given at the Town Hall meetings reflected the transportation needs and concerns of legislators, local officials, chambers of commerce, private industry, school districts, organizations, associations, and individual citizens. Those groups and individuals giving testimony geographically represented both urban and rural areas. Presenters came from large metropolitan cities with complex manufacturing and service industries as well as small towns and all points in between.

At every Town Hall meeting it was evident that those groups and individuals in attendance were very pleased with the results of the 1989 Comprehensive Highway Program and felt that it is important to build on the success of that program with a new Comprehensive Transportation Program (CTP). The consistent themes presented by the majority of those giving testimony centered on the safety, economic growth, and quality of life that results from an improved multimodal transportation system.

The Study Group heard the vital role transportation plays in tourism and the growing importance of tourism to the Kansas economy.

During the course of the Town Hall meetings, requests were made for improvement to several modes of transportation including highways, aviation, public transit, and rail. While many of the presenters focused on highways, a large number of citizens and officials expressed the needs of other modes of transportation. The public clearly stated that it wants and expects a CTP that addresses aviation, public transit, and rail needs as well as highways.

Highways

- ◆ *Safety and economic growth were major themes.*
- ◆ *Many requests were to upgrade existing two-lane corridors to four lanes and to provide shoulder improvements.*
- ◆ *A major link was seen between economic growth and highway improvements.*

Safety and economic growth were the main themes that were most often associated with highway needs and concerns at all 12 of the Transportation 2000 Town Hall meetings. Many of the presenters spoke about the need to increase the traffic-carrying capacity of particular highways to improve safety, while others spoke about the need to enhance or maintain the growth of an area by improving highway access to a city or region.

Regarding safety, the recurring improvement requests included upgrading existing two-lane corridors to four lanes, providing shoulders, adding turn lanes, improving line-of-sight, and adding passing lanes. Many presenters spoke of the need to make travel safer on Kansas highways for students, business-people, farmers, truck drivers, and the traveling public. Several people testified about personal experiences involving fatalities, injury accidents, and near misses on highways they said are unsafe due to increased traffic, narrow lanes, or inadequate shoulders.

Numerous requests were made for four-lane improvements of existing two-lane highways in areas where accidents and fatalities had increased significantly in recent years. For these locations it was stated that the highway simply was not capable of safely carrying the increased amount of traffic now using the route.

Many people testified about the lack of shoulders on highways. They said the lack of shoulders on many roads creates problems when passing or meeting wide loads such as farm equipment. They also stated their concern about safety when traveling on roads with narrow shoulders because there is no place to pull over and stop in case of car trouble or an emergency. Many presenters also stated their concerns about school bus safety on roads with inadequate shoulders, particularly where numerous stops for children are required.

The Study Group also heard testimony that spoke about the link between economic growth and the need for highway improvements. Presenters spoke about both the need to improve access to local businesses and to improve connections between regional centers of commerce and population.

Testimony was given describing improvements that would significantly improve business and industry access to markets. It was often explained that these improvements would contribute to lower

shipping costs and thus increase the ability of existing businesses to compete as well as encourage new businesses to relocate to a community. Many people spoke about the increased amount of commercial truck traffic on specific corridors due to the growth in business, manufacturing, and agribusiness sectors of the Kansas economy. Presenters also pointed out that improved safety would result from such improvements.

The need to improve existing highways connecting regional centers of commerce to four-lane status, as well as the construction or completion of bypasses, was of major importance to both large cities in urban areas and smaller communities along a corridor.

Local Jurisdiction

- ◆ *Local governments simply do not have enough resources to plan, design, maintain, or replace their roads and bridges.*
- ◆ *Lack of rail service is putting an extra burden on local roads.*
- ◆ *Funding for road maintenance and repair is limited in many counties due to the lid on property taxes.*

In addition to statewide concerns, numerous presenters testified about the needs of cities and counties for increased funding to assist in the maintenance and reconstruction of roads, streets, and bridges under local government jurisdiction.

Several city officials spoke about the need for increased assistance in maintaining and improving state highway connecting links within the city limits. These presenters often mentioned that costs to maintain and improve these routes had increased due to inflation.

Numerous presenters indicated that increased truck traffic often resulting from rail line abandonments had severely impacted the cost to maintain many local roads.

Many county officials said that funding for road maintenance and repair is limited due to the property tax lid. A number of these officials said they had not been successful in getting the lid lifted locally and therefore had very limited spending authority to address transportation needs.

A number of county officials said that financial assistance was needed to obtain engineering services. Most of these presenters stated that a qualified county engineer would greatly benefit their road and bridge program. However, they said that little or no funds are available for that purpose.

Aviation

- ◆ *State funding is needed to improve runways and taxiways, install runway lighting, and for navigational and weather equipment.*
- ◆ *Airports are important links for passenger and freight transportation, medical services, and economic growth.*

It became clear during the course of the Transportation 2000 Town Hall meetings that many public-use airports across Kansas have critical needs that could have an impact on pilot and passenger safety. It was stated that while some public-use airports are in good condition, many are in need of rehabilitation. At virtually every Town Hall meeting, testimony was given outlining the need for state funding to assist with improvements to runways and taxiways, as well as the need to install runway lighting, navigational instrumentation, and weather equipment. Several presenters stated that Kansas was the only state that does not currently provide state funding for airport improvements.

City and county officials, airport managers, associations, and private pilots stressed that public-use airports across Kansas must be improved. They pointed out that these facilities are important links for routine and emergency medical services, particularly in smaller rural communities. Testimony was given detailing instances in which medical Life Flight aircraft and visiting doctors could not land at some airports because of deteriorated runway conditions or inadequate runway length.

Several presenters also indicated that an adequate airport is a key ingredient for economic growth in smaller communities. They stated that to keep and attract major businesses a community must have an airport that can safely accommodate various size aircraft for business trips by owners, employees, and clients.

Public Transit

- ◆ *Increased funding is needed for operating expenses and capital expenditures.*
- ◆ *Public transit needs in both rural and urban areas are for adequate, timely, accessible, and affordable transportation for all citizens.*
- ◆ *Expanded service on evenings and weekends and paratransit service is clearly needed.*

Testimony at every Town Hall meeting detailing the ever-increasing demands for public transit throughout the state stressed the need for increased state funding for both operating expenses and capital expenditures for public transit. In general, the public transit needs in both rural and urban areas are for adequate, timely, accessible, and affordable transportation for all citizens. Groups representing elderly, disabled, working poor, and nondriving citizens spoke about the need for improved transportation services. Testimony was given calling for improvements to

transportation services to get people to and from work, to medical appointments, and social activities.

A variety of public transit providers explained that increased state funding is needed to address increasing operating expenses, as well as to replace high-mileage vehicles that have reached the end of their functional life. Several presenters provided information on the number of vehicle-miles driven and the passengers who were served to demonstrate the importance of these services.

Several people spoke about the need to improve coordination of services between jurisdictions. Some presenters gave examples of difficult and time-consuming trips involving multiple jurisdictions and providers. They explained that improved coordination between jurisdictions was needed to serve customers traveling from one jurisdiction to another.

They also requested that funding and regulations be made more flexible and that providers be encouraged to be more efficient using existing resources. Several urban providers asked that state funding be allowed for operating expenses and that funds be allowed to carry over from one year to the next if necessary.

Presenters from rural areas noted the importance of transportation to get people to medical services that had increasingly relocated to regional medical centers. Urban residents also spoke about the need for increased public transit to access medical services. People from all areas spoke about the need to provide improved access to jobs, shopping, and social events.

Testimony was also heard highlighting the heavy reliance on public transit by individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and the poor. Presenters said people use these services to meet a variety of daily activities and needs, including medical appointments, employment, shopping, and social activities. Representatives of transition councils pointed out how public transit helps young people with disabilities enter the workforce. For these

groups, public transit is a means to an improved quality of life. It was explained that in many cases, public transportation offers individuals the opportunity to remain independent and live at home.

A number of groups and individuals representing the disabled spoke about the need to improve the accessibility of public transit vehicles for disabled passengers. They said that intercity bus services need to comply with all appropriate laws, particularly Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

However, given the many requests for increased funding and services there was also testimony expressing the need to be realistic in the goals and objectives of the program. The view was stated that many improvements to public transit are needed, but the state and providers need to work closely with transit users to make sure their goals and objectives are real and attainable.

Overall, the Study Group heard a clear message calling for expanded services and extended hours of operation.

The Study Group also heard testimony about the efforts to develop commuter rail service in Kansas City. This effort would utilize an existing freight rail line to provide passenger service along the I-35 corridor in Johnson and Wyandotte counties. Presenters indicated that a great deal of planning had already taken place and efforts were continuing to cooperate with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to explore the viability of this project. In addition, this project has been identified in the federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

Rail

- ◆ *Testimony indicated that assistance was needed for track rehabilitation for shortline railroads.*
- ◆ *Shortline railroads are important to rural communities.*
- ◆ *Increasing traffic on high-density rail lines is a serious safety and mobility problem which must be addressed.*

Testimony given by shortline railroad owners and operators at several Transportation 2000 Town Hall meetings highlighted the deteriorating conditions of shortline railroad tracks and the need for a state loan or grant program for track rehabilitation. This need was also strongly supported by local officials who are concerned about the possible loss of rail service and the likely increase in heavy truck traffic on local roads to carry the products currently handled by rail. Several communities where rail lines had been abandoned spoke about the resulting increased amount of truck traffic and maintenance expenses on local roads and streets.

A number of individuals said assistance should be given to provide additional grain hopper cars, particularly during harvests. Other presenters said that Class I railroad companies should be encouraged to turn around the existing grain hopper cars more quickly and make them available to shortline operators.

An additional rail need in the state is providing grade separation structures between high-density rail lines and roads and highways. The mergers of the Burlington Northern and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe into the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe (BNSF) and the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific into the Union Pacific (UP) have brought attention to this need. Rail traffic has been consolidated on fewer miles of track with rail traffic densities increasing due

to shipments of Wyoming coal, containerized cargo, and unit grain trains. Train lengths are also increasing due to the use of distributed power; in some instances train lengths are as great as two miles.

This increased rail traffic and longer trains on fewer miles of track have created rail crossings that are blocked more frequently and for longer periods of time. This increased blockage has separated communities, delayed traffic for excessive periods of time, and disrupted emergency services.

Several presenters also spoke about the need to improve the safety of rail highway grade crossings with flashing lights and signals. Presenters were generally concerned about the safety of these crossings and the need for adequate markings and protection.

Summary

- ◆ *The public provided an overwhelming response to the request for input regarding transportation needs. More than 2,500 people attended the 12 Town Hall meetings and more than 500 presentations were made.*
- ◆ *Many attendees at the Town Hall meetings expressed strong endorsement of the CHP and praised KDOT's successful administration of that program.*
- ◆ *A great deal of coordination and cooperation among local units of government and community groups had taken place prior to the Town Hall meetings.*
- ◆ *Many presenters indicated that their requests had been pared down to reflect true needs.*

Statewide, the public provided an overwhelming response to the Study Group's request for input regarding transportation needs. More than 2,500 people attended the 12 Town Hall meetings held throughout the state during the summer. More than 500 presentations were made. In addition, the Study Group received nearly 100 letters or e-mails providing input on transportation needs.

It was apparent from the quality and content of the presentations by many local units of government that a great deal of coordination and cooperation had taken place prior to the Town Hall meetings. Several presentations featured input by city, county, and legislative officials who had met and decided on appropriate priorities for their area. This coordination and cooperation improved the quality of the information provided. It is also likely that these various jurisdictions will continue to work together on other issues as well as transportation.

The vast majority of testimony was presented in a positive manner to identify problems and suggest solutions and only a very few complaints were heard. People described their needs in an effort to obtain real improvement to the transportation system.

The requests presented total far more than any past or present program. However, the citizens and officials making those requests characterized them as "needs" not "wants." Many of the presenters indicated that their lists had been pared down to reflect true priorities. The fact that these requests far exceed past or present programs should not reduce the impact or importance of these programs, nor should it diminish the importance of the expressed needs. The amount of the requests was instead seen as the pent-up demand for improved transportation and the recognition that improvements such as those produced by the CHP should be expanded

The Study Group also heard a great deal of appreciation for its efforts. Local officials and

citizens were genuinely pleased that Study Group members took the time to come to their communities to listen to their needs. Several presenters complimented the Study Group for its diligence in carrying out these duties.

Finally, the Study Group heard time after time the strong endorsement of the CHP and praise for KDOT's successful administration of that program. Many of the presenters indicated that the success of that program in improving the transportation system showed what could be accomplished. In general, citizens strongly support the CHP and want to build on it.