

**ORAL REMARKS FOR LYNNE KELLER FORBES
SENATE COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN
AFFAIRS
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Thank you, Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Crapo, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to highlight our views on the new federal surface transportation law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), and the transportation investments the law provides, especially for our nation's small metropolitan and rural regions.

My name is Lynne Keller Forbes and I am the Executive Director of the South Eastern Council of Governments (SECOG), headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and serving the six most southeastern counties of the State. SECOG is also the fiscal agent of the Sioux Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO); the transportation planning organization for the Sioux Falls urbanized area.

As the committee examines the impacts of MAP-21 on public transportation and transportation investments in rural states like South Dakota, I respectfully submit the following observations:

First, Mr. Chairman, it is important to note the benefits of the law having rejected efforts to change the population threshold for becoming and remaining an MPO.

If MAP-21 would have included a provision to increase the population threshold of MPO's to 200,000, as one of the draft bills proposed, the Rapid City, Sioux City, and Sioux Falls MPOs would have been three of the 220 of 385 MPOs potentially eliminated; leaving the State of South Dakota with zero MPOs.

It is important to maintain MPOs in rural states like South Dakota to ensure the input of the citizens and local elected officials of small metropolitan areas are considered in the transportation planning process. The populations of the communities of the Sioux Falls MPO are increasing at record rates and the borders of these communities are continually growing closer together. The Cities of Brandon, Crooks, Harrisburg, and Tea currently have borders approximately one to two miles away from the City of Sioux Falls' border. The borders of these four communities will meet Sioux Falls' border by 2035. The literal closeness of these communities only emphasizes the importance of a local transportation planning organization to ensure coordination amongst the communities, to ensure the needs

of the region are met, and to ensure the voices of local citizens and elected officials are heard during the transportation planning and programming process.

The Sioux Falls MPO transportation planning budget has been just under \$2 million for the past few years and has increased to over \$3 million for 2013. The regionally significant activities accomplished with that funding include a transportation planning study of 41st Street and the I-29 interchange to identify potential projects to improve traffic flow on one of the busiest streets and interchanges in the state. A similar study is also being completed by the MPO for 26th Street and the I-229 interchange, an area that experiences significant traffic delays during the morning and evening commutes. In addition, a recent impressive collaboration by the Sioux Falls MPO communities resulted in the “Sioux Falls MPO Multi-Use Trail Study” to identify corridors to connect the trails of Brandon, Harrisburg, and Tea to Sioux Falls’ extensive trail system. Once implemented, pedestrians and bicyclists will have a safe way to travel between the MPO communities. Transit activities completed by the MPO include a recently completed route study to improve the Sioux Falls transit system and plan for future needs of the system. A space needs study was also recently completed to plan for the expanded needs of the transit system’s office and storage facility.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, the continued increase of federal support for public transportation, as demonstrated by MAP-21, is essential for the economic growth of rural states like South Dakota and small metropolitan areas like Sioux Falls.

Public transportation contributes to economic growth not only by connecting people to jobs, health care, businesses, and tourist destinations, but also by reducing the cost of transportation and creating jobs. According to a recent report completed by the South Dakota Department of Transportation entitled “Costs and Benefits of Public Transit in South Dakota” the transit riders’ out-of-pocket cost savings totaled \$10.3 million in 2010 in South Dakota. This out-of-pocket cost savings added \$7.6 million and 70 jobs to the State’s economy. The report also indicated that three jobs are created in the State for every 10 public transit jobs created. In 2010, public transit capital and operating expenses sustained 460 jobs and contributed \$38.5 million to the State’s economy. The combined economic impact is estimated at \$46.1 million annually.

The “Costs and Benefits” report concluded that for every dollar invested in public transit, there is \$2.07 economic and social benefit in the urbanized areas of the State such as Sioux Falls. MAP-21 authorized a slight increase in funding for

transit programs from \$10.458 billion in FY 2012 to \$10.578 billion in FY 2013 and \$10.695 billion in FY 2014. The increased funding allows for better transportation planning and will continue to contribute to the economic growth of the state and Sioux Falls area. Sioux Area Metro (SAM), Sioux Falls' public transit system, provided almost 1.2 million rides in 2012, a 3.1% increase from 2011. Additionally, SAM employs about 95 people and has an annual operating budget of around \$3.5 million.

With the previously mentioned growth that the Sioux Falls area has been experiencing, the transit service will need to be expanded to reach the new employment and residential areas of the community. The "Transit System Analysis – Grid Network Alternatives" study completed by the Sioux Falls MPO just last month concluded that an additional \$1.2 million, or about 1/3 of the current budget, would need to be added to SAM's annual operating budget for the extended transit service needed by year 2035. In addition, increased funding will be needed for capital costs such as additional buses and transfer centers and the expansion of the storage and office facilities. A recent space needs study completed by the MPO estimated that a \$13 million expansion of SAM's office, maintenance and storage facility will be needed to meet transit needs.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we are encouraged by the support for transportation planning and public transportation that is demonstrated by MAP-21.

As you have heard, the transportation planning funding and public transportation funding authorized by the transportation bills is effectively utilized in the Sioux Falls MPO and contributes significantly to the economy of the state of South Dakota. MAP-21 expires on September 30, 2014. As work begins on the next bill, sustained and increased support is needed to ensure coordinated transportation planning and programming activities among local citizens and elected officials are continued on a regional basis in rural states like South Dakota and to ensure the notable economic benefits of public transportation are not lost by our State.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify today. I'd be pleased to answer any questions.