

Senate Budget Committee Testimony

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City of Dickinson

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My name is Dennis Johnson. I presently serve as President of the Dickinson City Commission. This is my ninth year in that capacity. I am a Western North Dakota native and have lived in Dickinson the past 35 years. On behalf of the citizens of Dickinson and Southwest North Dakota it is my honor to extend to Senator Conrad a warm welcome to our community. We are pleased that you are here to hold this hearing regarding "The U.S. 85 Corridor".

Dickinson is home to about 18,000 people. It is the largest city in the southwest quadrant of North Dakota. Dickinson, of the larger North Dakota cities, has the most diversified economy and may be the most entrepreneurial city in North Dakota. Dickinson's economy is not overly dependent upon one economic sector. It participates in multiple economic sectors.

There is a solid **agricultural** economy in Southwest North Dakota consisting of both production agriculture and ranching.

There is a robust **energy** economy in Western North Dakota. Western North Dakota has oil, natural gas, lignite coal, and ethanol production. Currently, the Bakken formation is one of the largest oil plays in the lower 48 states. The formation covers portions of Western North Dakota, Eastern Montana, and Southern Saskatchewan. While much of our commerce historically travels east and west, the oil industry in Western North Dakota travels predominately north and south connecting the cities of Houston, Denver, Gillette, Dickinson, Sidney, and Williston. In addition to the oil and coal industry this region also has electrical generation capacity that includes coal and natural gas fired plants and wind generation.

Dickinson has a growing **manufacturing** economy. There are in excess of 1300 manufacturing jobs in our community. This is a high concentration considering the size of our city. The manufacturing companies are a diverse group producing institutional furniture, food products, gravel handling equipment, electric thermal storage heaters, oil storage tanks, aircraft electrical harnesses and circuit boards, and solar powered water mixing equipment. A very large majority of their manufactured products are marketed outside of North Dakota.

Dickinson has a vibrant **service** economy. It serves a regional area that extends into Montana and South Dakota providing education, retail, financial, medical, recreation, and other professional services. Dickinson State University's 2,800 students come from a large geographical area.

The **tourism** economy is a significant contributor to the area's economy. Dickinson is the gateway community to the Theodore Roosevelt National Park and the historic town of Medora. Both are located within the scenic North Dakota Badlands about 30 miles west of Dickinson. About 500,000 people annually travel to the National Park to enjoy sightseeing, camping, hiking, biking and horseback riding in the Badlands. About 100,000 people during the summer attend the Medora Musical in its outdoor amphitheatre. People visit Medora and the Badlands because of its historical connection with Theodore Roosevelt.

This area also attracts those who hunt and fish. Western North Dakota is well known for its world class pheasant, water fowl, and mule deer hunting. Lake Sakakawea located north of Dickinson has excellent walleye fishing, boating, and other water recreation.

Dickinson has a solid **construction** economy that services the local building needs of the region. Last year the City issued 285 building permits totaling just over \$45,000,000 in value. Housing values continue to rise within the city.

While the Dickinson area economy consists of many diverse segments an important common need for each segment is truck transportation. We are fortunate to be serviced by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad for inbound and outbound transportation for major commodities. However, most of the area's inbound and outbound transportation needs are met by trucks. A sparsely populated rural area such as Western North Dakota is highly dependent upon the trucking industry.

We are fortunate to be located on Interstate 94. I-94 provides area businesses with a safe and efficient outbound east west corridor to markets. The I-94 corridor also provides Dickinson with quality inbound transportation service for goods and materials consumed by area businesses and citizens.

It would be a great economic boost to this area if we had a highway similar to I-94 that would provide equally safe and efficient transportation in a north south direction. In my opinion it would make markets north and south of us more accessible. It would also be easier for our area to import goods from a north south direction into our area. I also believe it would be safer for motorists moving in a north south direction. I would encourage developing U.S. Highway 85 into either a super two or four lane format.