

Statement of

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Before the

Subcommittee on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Federal Programs and the  
Federal Workforce

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

on

*“A More Efficient and Effective Government Examining Efforts to Address Law  
Enforcement, Infrastructure, and Economic Development in the Bakken”*

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Chairman Carper, Senator Tester, and Members of the Committee:

I am Mike Tooley, Director of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). I greatly appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

I think it is terrific that the Subcommittee is holding this field hearing and outreach session in Montana's impacted Bakken region. Growth from energy exploration and extraction has generated additional pressure on transportation infrastructure and Montana communities, but also has contributed positively to the economic vitality of the region. We at MDT see this as a good challenge to have, given the positive growth and economic impact, and we are doing our best to respond responsibly to the impacts.

MDT's focus in the region is to provide safe and efficient transportation systems for the traveling public and to support the economic activity. For MDT, as is almost always the case with infrastructure agencies, needs vastly outpace the resources available, so it's essential that we make smart and timely decisions to provide the public with the greatest benefit possible from our resources.

**Bakken Region Transportation Issues: An Overview**

To provide some scale to the issues, of MDT's 12,000 system miles across the state, approximately 3,350 are in this district of MDT, the Glendive District. We've seen a significant increase in traffic volumes, largely made up of heavy truck traffic, which has increased as much as 32% between 2007 and 2013 in some areas. Pavement designs are largely driven by heavy truck traffic and this kind of an increase can drastically impact the life and condition of

pavement. In addition to deteriorating pavement, increased volumes and high truck traffic also have impacts on roadway operations with instances of limited passing opportunities and “tight” intersection geometrics, as our highways are also the main thoroughfares through communities.

We’ve also had a hard time attracting and retaining employees and contractors in the district as Maintenance, Motor Carrier Services, and Construction staff knowledge and experience are similar to the skills desired in the oil development industry. We cannot match energy industry pay. That, coupled with escalating housing prices in the region, have led to ongoing vacant positions and high turnover in our Maintenance and MCS units. Once we’ve hired and trained staff they can easily move on to better paying jobs in the oil development industry. Impacts of increased competition aren’t limited to our staffing needs, but also affect private engineering and construction services. We’ve had instances where prime contractors receive few or no bids from subcontractors for highway projects due to the increased demand in the area for energy sector and other private sector work. MDT has seen unit cost increases for key materials which drive up project costs, decreasing the buying power of limited funding we have available.

### **MDT Efforts: So what are we doing?**

**In response to these challenges, we are doing the best with what we’ve got.** We have tools at hand that help us make good decisions while also allowing MDT to identify and provide targeted improvements when opportunity exists. Our long standing asset management based approach to allocating our federal funds, called the Performance Programming Process (P3), allows MDT to make appropriate investment decisions and develop an optimal funding plan, given limited resources. This needs based process is responding to the Bakken impact with recent P3 recommendations shifting slightly more funding to the Glendive District for system improvements, while still being mindful of statewide infrastructure needs. MDT currently has over 100 miles of recently completed and planned projects in the Glendive District through 2019 for a total investment of \$40-50M. Many of these project investments are influenced by energy impacts. Maintenance contracts have also increased since 2010, with nearly \$6 million more invested since 2010 than would have previously been allocated to the district for these activities.

**Quick Response Projects** - MDT’s district can identify emerging needs through communication with local Governments and develop projects quickly. For example, the 2012 Fairview Intersection Improvements project provided a traffic signal at MT-200 and 6th street, and intersection improvements at MT-200/Secondary 201 to better accommodate truck turning movements. In addition, MDT worked with local partners to develop a pre-NEPA corridor planning study and safety audit along the approximately 60-mile MT 16/ MT 200 corridor between Glendive and Fairview. Improvements have already resulted from these studies, including the addition of passing lanes, wider shoulders and centerline rumble strips along MT 16, and a reduced speed limit along the corridor.

**Local Support thru Planning** - These pre-NEPA Corridor Plans and Safety Audit Studies allow MDT to work with local governments, communities, FHWA, and resource agencies to target the highest need corridors and improvement options. Studies develop both short term easily implemented improvement projects and long-term corridor needs. These studies identify highly effective, easily implemented improvements that address or head off emerging issues. Another example is the Culbertson Corridor Study that identified cost effective improvements for the intersection of MT-16 and US-2 in Culbertson. An upcoming project in the community will include wider road surfaces, curb and gutter, and intersection improvements with turn lanes.

MDT has additional studies underway to consider options for addressing truck traffic impacts thru Baker and a cooperative effort with ND on a study through Fairview.

**Safety Focused** – MDT is committed to *Vision Zero*, zero serious crashes and zero fatalities along Montana highways and all of MDT’s project and maintenance activities focus on improving safety for all travelers. MDT Motor Carrier Services recently partnered with the Montana Highway Patrol through two Operation Safe Driver events, each two days, involving an MHP Officer riding in a MDT commercial motor vehicle and observing how traffic operates around the test vehicle.

Given increased rail traffic, MDT is also using the Highway-Rail Safety Program to invest in rail-highway grade crossing improvements, with twelve highway-rail grade crossing projects in various stages. These include projects that will install stop signs, flashing lights, and crossbucks (railroad crossing signs), totaling almost \$5M.

In addition, MDT’s Highway Traffic Safety Bureau provides about \$1 M between 2010 and 2015 for behavioral programs including multi-county DUI courts, additional Law enforcement patrols, coordination of seatbelt programs, and anti-drinking and driving campaigns.

**Federal Financial Role** – Except for some of our highway maintenance activities, all of the above highway and highway safety investments are supported by federal highway apportionments to our State – and they are vitally important. In addition, this region receives air service supported by the Essential Air Service program and Amtrak service. While those services are essential for national and regional connectivity to our State, without them there could be some additional highway traffic, causing additional pressure on our road system in this region.

**Closing:**

In conclusion, Montana’s transportation infrastructure is dependent on continued federal funding and a strong federal investment in the nation’s transportation systems. These federal programs/funds are essential for our economy, supporting industry, jobs, and growth in the Bakken, while ensuring that the nation is poised to capitalize on the benefits of domestic oil and natural resource production.

We anticipate the impact in the Bakken area to continue for the next few decades and recognize that additional funding and attention to our infrastructure is necessary. To maintain the condition and operation of our systems, federal funding levels must continue at least at current levels, adjusted for inflation. MDT encourages support for long-term funding solutions for the federal surface transportation program - and emphasizes our commitment to make the most effective use of the resources available for the benefit of Montana’s citizens and industry.

Thanks again for the opportunity to testify today.

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