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March 4, 2021

Representative Dan Ruby, Chairman  
House Transportation Committee

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

My name is Dan Zink, I am with the Red River Valley & Western Railroad Company (RRVW), headquartered in Wahpeton, ND. The RRVW is one of four short line railroads in North Dakota. Short Line railroads are small companies that provide local rail service in rural parts of North Dakota where the larger railroad networks do not reach. The map on page 2 of this letter shows the many rural branch lines and communities that short line railroads serve in North Dakota (shown highlighted in yellow).

This letter is to express my opposition to SB 2026 which would give executive authority to the Governor to allow operation of "Road Trains" on North Dakota roads and highways.

Recently the ND Legislature granted authority to allow up to 129,000 lb loads on a specified network of highways in ND. This was a 61 percent increase in weight, and now SB 2026 would increase that limit to an unknown length and unlimited weight. I do not know if the bill's proponents have used the recent 129,000 lb network option, but I have to ask, how much is enough?

When the 129,000 lb network was established, it was thoroughly researched and analyzed by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, which gave the process credibility and an orderly, scientific review. At a minimum, this is the type of rigorous study that should be conducted for the "Road Trains" proposal, to include all the engineering challenges, safety issues, local road impacts, and other issues that are still unknown. It should also provide an objective look at the impact on short line railroads and how the bill will affect the future of the many rural communities served by short line railroads.

If higher allowable truck weights and lengths are permitted, it is the short line railroad companies that will be impacted the most. Many of our carload shipments are shorter distances and within the State's borders. Therefore the economic impact will be concentrated on these smaller railroad companies, not on the larger railroads whose much longer shipments are far less likely to be affected. This will also shift freight transportation from the privately maintained short line railroad network to the publicly maintained county and state road network.

We therefore stand in opposition to SB 2026.

Respectfully,

Daniel L. Zink  
Red River Valley & Western Railroad Company  
Wahpeton, ND

