



# Chamber of Commerce

*Your business advocate since 1931*

May 8, 2014

Senator Christine Kaufmann, Chair  
Revenue and Transportation Interim Committee  
PO Box 201706  
Helena, MT 59620-1706

RE: SJR 26 Study

Dear Chairwoman Kaufmann:

My apologies for missing the Revenue and Transportation Interim Committee (RATIC) hearing on May 6 on Senate Joint Resolution 26 to study oversized load corridors for Montana.

The Montana Chamber of Commerce feels that the lack of clearly designated corridors for oversized loads serves as yet another disincentive for businesses, in particular manufacturers, to locate in Montana. Montana is well positioned geographically to serve the strong demand for manufactured equipment generated by oil and gas development in Canada and the Bakken.

Foremost, we would like to be on the record supporting a RATIC committee bill directing the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to identify and designate preferred state and federal roadways to serve as corridors to transport oversized loads throughout the state. Additionally, the MDT should be required to coordinate with local governments and businesses to identify and designate local roadways to ensure access to the state and federal roadways designated as corridors. Any legislation should appropriate money to fund necessary upgrades to accommodate oversized loads on the designated corridors. Fees associated with any permit system should be commensurate with the cost of administration.

The legislation also should clarify that local jurisdictions do not have the authority to impose a separate permit process and/or fee for oversized loads transported solely on state or federal roadways. Additionally, relating to local governments, we suggest that RATIC look into requiring them to consider the transport of oversized loads in any capital improvement plan and/or growth policy so that infrastructure changes or enhancements consider oversized load transport. For example, if a locality has a manufacturer that builds and transports oversized loads, local governments should coordinate with the manufacturer to ensure access to designated corridors. This may require localities (and utilities) to: 1) raise or bury power lines; 2) raise or bury telecommunications lines; 3) relocate utility poles and wires; 4) install swing-out, swivel-bolted, or cantilevered traffic signals and lights; 5) replace overhead flashing lights with solar-powered signs; and 6) construct strategic road-turnouts in high-traffic areas.

Lastly, any permit process at the state level should be user-friendly and expeditious. Many states have adopted online permitting for users, and many permit processes allow users to apply for and self-issue permits. The online system could offer a GIS-based mapping system to provide turn-by-turn directions, which would increase route safety.

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Not tackling this issue next session will perpetuate the perception from oil and gas developers in Canada and the Bakken (as well as businesses in other sectors of the economy) that oversize loads cannot be reliably transported through Montana. We have a chance to rectify this situation by passing legislation that will logically and fairly designate "commerce corridors," coordinate with local governments, and adopt a predictable permit process for these manufacturers, which are creating jobs and a solid tax base for the state and local communities.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments on this important state policy matter. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Glenn Oppel".

Glenn Oppel  
Government Relations Director