

Testimony  
of  
the Honorable Kris Knochelmann  
before the  
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Small Business  
March 6, 2019

Good morning, I am Kris Knochelmann, Kenton County, Kentucky Judge Executive and President of the Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI). It is an honor to appear before you to discuss the vital importance of reliable transportation infrastructure on all business, particularly small business.

I am a small business owner. My family business started in 1926. By the hard, creative work of many, and God's good fortune, my business has grown, and now employs 64 people. We are located in the greater Cincinnati region with operations in Kentucky and Ohio.

All of us live in a global economy with trillions of transactions, in millions of markets, driving commerce in every corner of the world. However, any accurate reading of data will show that almost all economies, and certainly the United States' economy, is driven by small business. In the United States, small business is the growth engine for jobs and critical to our place on the world economic stage. Small business encompasses 99.7% of United States employer firms; half of all employment; 60% of all new jobs; 98% of all exporting firms; 46% of private sector output...and the list goes on.

As competitors in the world economy, all businesses, particularly small businesses, need to get their products to their customers in the most efficient manner. The transmission of goods is dependent on adequate transportation infrastructure, particularly sound, effective roads and bridges. Alarming, our country's transportation infrastructure is in such poor condition that it is stifling our economy.

The facts are frightful. Over 70,000 bridges are structurally deficient. 40% of urban road miles are congested. We waste \$160 billion due to congestion every year. And, the problem is not just economic; 30% of all accidents are the result of poor road conditions...and, highway deaths in this country have risen to over 40,000 per year. This country's infrastructure network problem is so large, it is estimated it would take a trillion dollars just to bring it up to standard.

While the burden of our deteriorating infrastructure affects all businesses and their employees, it falls most heavily on small businesses. Small businesses, like mine, are least able to absorb the impacts of road delays on fuel costs and wasted time.

Small businesses, almost by definition, are closer to their customers than larger companies. The currency of my small business is not only the American dollar, but, the trust I must have with my customers who live on my street, in my neighborhood and around my region. If my employees are stuck in traffic and cannot be on time for an appointment, my customer can easily find my competitors by pressing a button on their cell phone. If my fuel costs rise because of wasted time in traffic, I cannot pass them on to unknown stockholders. My employees and I bear the brunt of lost dollars due to poor infrastructure.

In my part of the country, we have one of the nation's most critically needed infrastructure projects, the Brent Spence Bridge.

The Brent Spence Bridge crosses the Ohio River from Cincinnati into my home county in Kentucky. However, it also connects Michigan to Miami and other points north to south because it is the lynchpin of the I-75 and I-71 trade corridors. The bridge was constructed to carry 80,000 vehicles a day. It now carries 160,000 vehicles. It was engineered over 50 years ago to handle 3,000 trucks per day; it now carries over 30,000 trucks per day. Years ago, the safety lanes were removed, making a simple lane change a dangerous maneuver. The costs of congestion caused by the bridge is approaching a billion dollars a year. The value of the Brent Spence Bridge to our nation and our region is obvious because over this bridge \$1 billion of freight pass every day. The Brent Spence Bridge is the poster child of aging and inadequate infrastructure in our country.

I want thank Congressman Chabot for all he has done over the years to put the needs of the Brent Spence Bridge front and center for the Congress.

If you look at the traffic on the Brent Spence Bridge, you will not only see hundreds of semi-trailer trucks, but you will see thousands of panel trucks; trucks like my company's. Every day, those small trucks, carrying so much of our region's and our nation's economy, fight thousands of hours of delay to get to our customers.

It will cost \$2.5 billion to replace the Brent Spence Bridge; that is a very large number. However, if you do the math, we would pay for the bridge in about two years by savings in fuel and time.

I am sure that many committees do important work to keep our economy the strongest in the world, grow the job base to promote an envious standard of living and make our future bright. However, to me, it is your committee that is vitally important to my employees and their families. You have their interests before you and you have the critical charge to help all small business share in bounty of great economy. For that, I thank you and I wish the best of good fortune in carrying out your important duties