

March 6, 2026

Re: Opposition to HF 3728

On behalf of the US Highway 169 Range Gateway Coalition, we write in opposition to House File 3728. As introduced, it would foreclose our ability to address critical safety and freight movement issues on Highway 169 in Itasca County for the foreseeable future.

Our coalition brings together counties, cities, townships, businesses, trade organizations, and individuals who are united to improve Highway 169 through Itasca County and the Iron Range. Today, only 8 miles of two-lane highway remains on the nearly sixty-mile stretch of highway between Grand Rapids and Virginia. The two-lane portion of the highway remains dangerous, and continues to result in fatal accidents.

We've been thrilled by our partnership with the legislature and MnDOT in recent years. In 2023, the legislature partnered with us to put planning dollars toward the project, to help bring it up to shovel readiness. The federal government followed in 2024 by appropriating dollars to help move a portion of the project forward. Along the way, the legislature honored the late Senator David Tomassoni by naming this corridor after him.

Still, we may face a years-long regulatory process before construction on the project can start. Our project is just one of many where the solutions that maximize safety will meet the definition of a "capacity expansion" project that would be prohibited in this bill for the foreseeable future. We understand that the goal of House File 3728 is to encourage responsible management of our transportation dollars. We support that goal as well, but this bill is a blunt instrument that makes it unclear if a project like ours could ever move forward.

The people who use 169 to get to and from work, enjoy the outdoors, or see friends and family deserve to do so safely.

Please do not pass House File 3728. If a broader discussion takes place about how to responsibly approach safety investments on our highways while also preserving our existing road system, we will be eager to be a part of it, but this bill's approach will not get us there.

Thank you for your consideration.

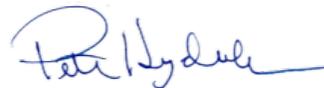
Sincerely,

Casey Venema



Chair, Range Gateway Coalition
Commissioner, Itasca County

Pete Hyduke



Vice Chair, Range Gateway Coalition
Mayor, City of Hibbing