

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Kevon Martis

District 7 Commissioner

Chairman, Personnel, Ways and Means Committee

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Good afternoon, Chair Jenkins-Arno, Vice-chair Robinson and Minority Chair Martus.

First, I would like to say that I have had the privilege of serving with Representative Jenkins-Arno over the past two years as a county commissioner and we miss her dearly! But we are blessed to have her be our voice in Lansing.

I am speaking today on behalf of my constituent, the Southern Michigan Railroad Society. For over 40 years, the SMRS has successfully operated a tourist rail operation over approximately 7 miles of their 14-mile right-of-way between Clinton and Tecumseh in Lenawee County. Unlike many tourist rail operations, they own this ROW outright and they maintain their operation without outside financial support and are debt free. Seasonally, they bring 7-9000 people per year to the Clinton/Tecumseh corridor, allowing folks to experience these two fine Michigan communities from a unique rail perspective.

Since I was first elected in 2022, improved transportation, particularly rail transportation, has been of prime concern to me and my district.

Unlike other counties, **Lenawee County does not have direct access to the interstate highway network which is a key factor in attracting industry.** But we do have a *Norfolk Southern (NS)* railroad mainline that carries 24 freight trains a day on their busy Detroit-Kansas City artery. Large Class 1 railroads like *NS* focus on large customers and longer haul distances. They often rely upon local "short line" railroads to collect and distribute rail cars to smaller commercial and industrial customers. It has been my belief that the trackage owned by *SMRS* can become an important feeder line for already-existing county industries, particularly *Wacker Chemical*, *Eden Foods* and *Hardwoods of Michigan*, all of which have rail-adjacent facilities along the *SMRS*. And it can attract new industries that need direct access to the national rail network.

Two years ago, I brought together representatives of *Wacker*, *NS*, *SMRS*, Nikki Johnson of MDOT's rail section, representatives of *Lenawee Now*, our county's economic development organization as well as the CEO of the *A and B Railroad*, another short line railroad operating in my district. **There was broad agreement that by restoring the *SMRS* right-of-way, a greater variety of economic development opportunities could develop in Lenawee County.**

Wacker Chemical

Of particular interest is the case of *Wacker Chemical*. They operate a silicone manufacturing plant in Raisin Township in Lenawee County that is adjacent to *SMRS* right-of-way. In fact, they were previously served by rail at that facility during the Conrail era, but that ended when Conrail sold the branch. In the meeting I referenced above, *Wacker* had several of their logistics people talk about the importance of rail transportation. They also discussed the value of restoring direct rail access for their Lenawee facility, which could **keep that facility competitive with their other locations which already enjoy direct rail and interstate highway access.**

It is important to Lenawee County that we retain *Wacker Chemical* and their high paying manufacturing and technical jobs and not lose them to other communities with better transportation infrastructure.

And just last week, I participated in a webinar that discussed the difficulties in finding rail-adjacent properties for industries that benefit from direct rail access. It also discussed the fact that having direct rail access makes existing facilities more marketable to a wider range of users. The Tecumseh/Clinton corridor has 8 existing facilities that are already adjacent to the SMRS ROW including one that has a spur into the site.

If granted, this appropriation request will not only benefit the SMRS tourist operations which already brings thousands of tourists a year into our county. **It would also become the first critical component of a long-term transportation rail infrastructure plan already developing in Lenawee County.**

As a conservative, this proposal also meets my personal tests for governmental expenditures:

1. It is directed toward transportation infrastructure, an area long recognized as an appropriate area for governmental investment.
2. It is durable. The improvements to this ROW will persist for decades, making the amortized cost very low on an annual basis.
3. It can increase competition across modes of transportation which will strengthen the position of local shippers when negotiating shipping rates from different providers.

On the behalf of my constituents in Lenawee Couty, I humbly ask for your support for this request.

Feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Martis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kevon Martis
Lenawee County Commissioner
Chairman, Lenawee County Ways and Means Committee
517-403-2438