



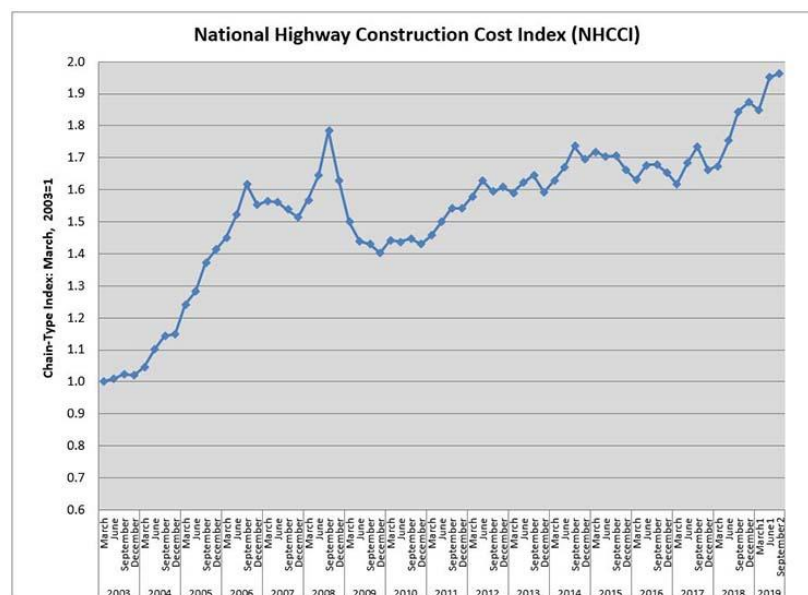
CORNELL R. ROBERTSON, P.E., P.S.
FRANKLIN COUNTY ENGINEER

April 28, 2021

The Honorable Kristina D. Roegner, Co-Chair
The Honorable Mark Johnson, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Committee on Force Accounts

Thank you for your service to our constituents and for this opportunity to testify before this Joint Committee to consider raising Force Account limits for counties and other political subdivisions. My name is Cornell Robertson, Franklin County Engineer. As county engineer of the most populous county in Ohio, I manage the use of and prioritize \$30M/year of license plate fees and \$4M/year of gas tax revenue to design, build, and maintain Franklin County's 800 lane miles of roads and 360 bridges. Raising Force Account limits is extremely important not only for large urban counties, but also important for small rural counties, and counties of all sizes in-between.

Local government Force Account limits have not been increased for 18 years, since 2003. We are simply trying to get back to the same purchasing ability as in 2003. Inflation rates have increased year after year, with the National Highway Construction Cost Index doubling over that same amount of time. County engineers are not in the business of making a profit, but we are in the business of right-sourcing for our constituents and selecting the best tool from the toolbox for any given project. Large projects are best done by out-sourcing via the competitive bidding process. But other projects are best done in-house with our own crews. Right-sourcing ensures that we use taxpayers' dollars most efficiently and that we get as much out of their funds as possible. Increasing the Force Account limits to reflect constructing today what we were able to construct in 2003 is the most efficient use of our taxpayers' dollars. After 18 years local agencies need to be able to build the same bridges and the same roadways that we were allowed to build in 2003 with our very competent, trained, and efficient work force.



2003-2019 increase of 96%

I have the following specific, real-life examples to illustrate the need for the increase:

Example 1 in 2019:

- Braun Rd over Snyder Ditch Bridge Replacement in Madison Township
- As Franklin County Engineer, my Force Account Estimate was \$160,000 to build with our own crews. Therefore, too expensive for us to build being above the current \$100,000 limit.
- We put it out for competitive bidding and received bids ranging from \$297,000 to \$394,000. More expensive by \$137,000 and 1.9 times as expensive on the lower end of the competitive bid range.

Example 2 in 2020:

- Ridpath Rd over Stanford Smith Ditch Bridge Replacement in Jackson Township
- As Franklin County Engineer, my Force Account Estimate was \$178,000 to build with our own crews. Therefore, too expensive for us to build being above the current \$100,000 limit.
- We put it out for competitive bid and received bids ranging from \$339,000 to \$394,000. More expensive by \$161,000 and 1.9 times as expensive on the lower end of the competitive bid range.

Another comparison for my force account request is to that of home improvements. Small home improvements are best done by the homeowner, and would be very costly to hire out to a remodeling company for every little project. However, large home improvements are undoubtedly best done by hiring a remodeling company. A bridge culvert that we could build with Franklin County Engineer crews, equipment, and materials could cost taxpayers almost twice as much via the competitive bidding process, and would take more than twice as long to complete. I agree that it's best to use the competitive bid process for the larger bridges that require a larger labor force and equipment larger than what we have on-hand. The Franklin County Engineer's Office is capable of completing additional force account work using our existing crews and equipment, while still maintaining our current roles and responsibilities.

We have a wide variety of project sizes so we will still have plenty of road and bridge projects to put out for competitive bidding. Over the past three years, the two bridges noted above could have been built by the Franklin County Engineer Bridge Department if the Force Account limits reflected what we were able to build in 2003. Notably, however, there were 9 other bridges, that we put out for competitive bidding over those same years totaling \$17M. Had we been able to build those two bridges noted above with our own crews, we could have used the savings to put out another big bridge for competitive bid or built two additional smaller bridges by our own crews giving our constituents one to three new, safe bridges for the same total amount of their hard-earned tax dollars.

It is incumbent upon us to right-source projects and spend taxpayers' money most prudently. In closing, I respectfully request that Force Account limits be raised for counties to help us get back to the same purchasing ability and to enable us to build the same bridges and the same roadways that we were allowed to build in 2003. Thank you for taking my comments into consideration.

Sincerely,



CRR

Cornell R. Robertson, P.E., P.S.
Franklin County Engineer

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