

North Dakota ambulance providers losing money on every run, according to survey

By Michael Achterling/
North Dakota Monitor

North Dakota ambulance service providers lost nearly \$500 on average for every patient transported to a medical facility last year, according to a survey.

The recent survey of three dozen providers in the state, conducted by PWW Advisory Group, was the result of a study created by House Bill 1322 passed during the 2025 legislative session. The group presented the results to the Legislature's interim Emergency Response Services Committee last Wednesday.

The average revenue generated from an ambulance transport was about \$1,100 during 2025, but the expenses were nearly \$1,600, said Matt Zavadsky, an EMS and mobile health care consultant with PWW, based in Pennsylvania.

"They are losing money every time they respond to a call," Zavadsky said during the meeting. "That financial loss has to be made up, typically, by local tax subsidies, fundraisers, bake sales, or all too often, service reductions to try and match expenses with the revenue they can generate."

He said the problem cannot be fixed by billing reform alone because the revenue generated isn't enough to fund the cost of readiness, such as personnel, equipment and supplies, among other items.

The survey highlighted 74% of ambulance provider expenses went to personnel costs, but equipment costs have also increased in recent years.

Zavadsky said survey respondents plan to invest about \$12.9 million into vehicle and equipment purchases over the next five years, averaging to about \$358,000 per provider. However, the cost of a new ambulance has risen to between \$275,000 to \$480,000 per vehicle. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a new ambulance could cost up to \$250,000, he said.

There are more than 100 ambulance service providers



An ambulance departs the Sanford Medical Center in Fargo, North Dakota, on Sept. 13, 2025. Photo by Jeff Beach/North Dakota Monitor

in North Dakota. The 36 survey respondents represented a diverse group of providers from city and county services to district-owned, hospital-based and private providers, he said. The average patient transport distance is 34 miles, according to the survey.

Zavadsky said the survey respondents reported 53% of their total revenue was generated from fees for service with the remaining 47% coming from local tax subsidies, state grants and other fundraising.

"What you guys are experiencing in North Dakota and what is happening in the local communities ... is not the fault of the local communities, not the fault of the state, this is just our new normal," Zavadsky said.

Rep. Todd Porter, R-Mandan, owner of Metro-Area Ambulance Service which serves Morton and Burleigh counties, said Medicare patients reimburse ambulance providers at a much lower rate than private insurance and Medicaid patients. He added Medicare patients make up about 60% of the call volume in the Bismarck-Mandan area.

"If we're being underpaid for 60% of our call volume, then we have to make it up some place," Porter said.

He said some providers can make up that difference in reimbursement with tax dollars, but not all providers have that option.

"We do other contracted work for nursing homes, hospitals, funeral homes in order to make up that difference," Porter said. "This is a federal government problem. This is a CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) problem that we've known about for years."

Porter also said ambulance services are not reimbursed for responding to a call with a Medicare patient that doesn't require a transport to a hospital. According to the survey, about 17% of all ambulance calls don't require transport to a medical facility.

The survey also showed about 2,300 of the nearly 33,600 patient transports billed last year ended up in collections after being more than 90 days delinquent, totaling \$2.7 million, Zavadsky said. The average total of a claim sent to collections was about \$1,100.

Zavadsky estimated the total of unpaid claims for more than 100 providers across North Dakota was about \$5.8 million in 2025. Some providers don't have procedures to pursue delinquent billing in collections, he said.

Rep. Jim Grueneich, R-Ellendale, chair of the committee, said the committee will take a deeper look at the data presented on Wednesday and may have recommendations, and possible draft legislation, to address the issue in the 2027 legislative session.

NDDOT rolls out updates to ND Roads travel map

By Valley News and Views Staff

The North Dakota Department of Transportation has been working on upgrading how the ND Roads travel map works to improve user experience and expand the tracking capabilities of snowplows across the state.

Recent system upgrades inside trucks now allow photo and location data from more plows to be shared with users of the travel map, found at <https://travel.dot.nd.gov>. Users will be able to see what snowplow drivers across the state see outside their windows. Additional information includes speed of travel and direction of travel when the photo was taken.

"Previously, only one-third of the state's 352 snowplows could share location data," said Barry Kinnischtzke, NDDOT operations

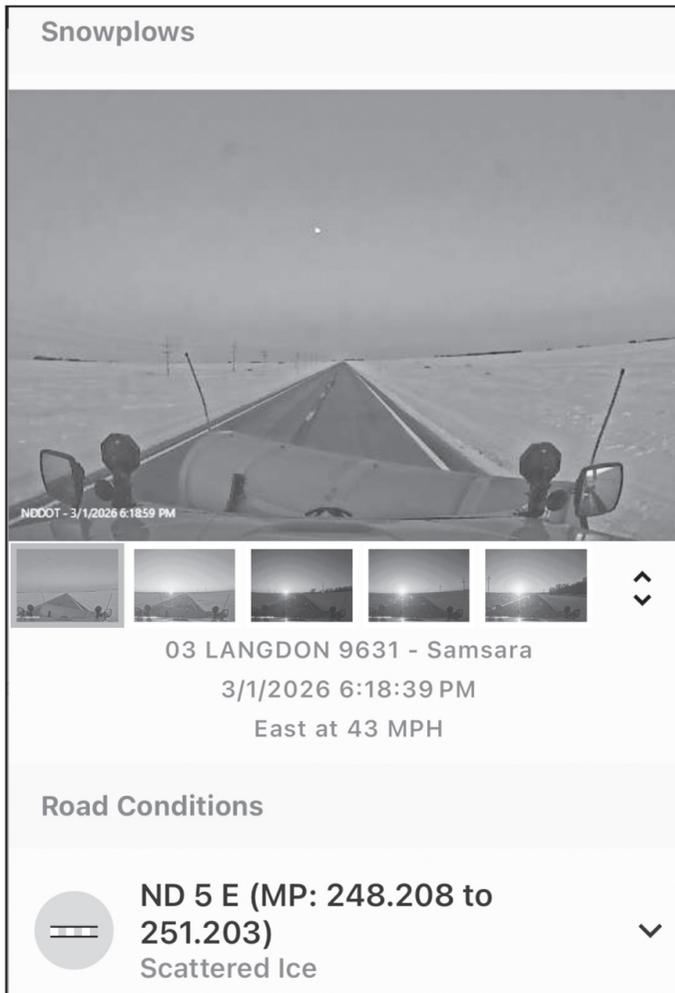
section team leader. "Now, most plows are visible on the map, and we expect all plows to be upgraded this winter."

Additional improvements will include an updated map legend and the visibility of highway numbers.

Commercial users will benefit from the updates as well, there is a new link to LoadPass Permits. The truck permitting system provides a centralized location for companies to obtain overweight and over-dimension permits for travel on local roads.

Kinnischtzke says the updates build on a tool that already helps motorists make informed travel decisions.

The ND Roads travel map is also available through the ND Roads mobile app on the Google Play and Apple App Store. For more information visit dot.nd.gov



A screenshot from the ND Roads app shows some of the updates. Users can see what plow drivers are seeing in addition to the direction of travel and speed.

Lawmakers seek to smooth rift between some infrastructure developers, landowners

By Jacob Orledge/North Dakota Monitor

North Dakota lawmakers are looking for ways to reduce the friction between landowners and developers of infrastructure projects, such as pipelines and powerlines, as debate continues on how to balance private property rights and economic development.

Matt Perdue, president of the North Dakota Farmer's Union, said one way to avoid many of the recent disputes is for companies developing a project to have proactive conversations with landowners, local officials and communities.

"We all want to see our rural communities survive. We want to see them thrive," Perdue said during a Feb. 26 meeting of the interim Energy Development and Transmission Committee at the civic center in Center, northwest of Bismarck. "I think that puts the responsibility on all of us to ensure that we're doing everything we can to build healthy conversations so people can make well informed

decisions about these projects."

Rep. Mike Brandenburg, R-Edgeley, said he thinks many citizens do not realize that by opposing further development, they are undercutting the revenue sources local governments will need in the future.

"They're cutting off their own life-support," Brandenburg said.

Brandenburg's district is home to a project that has prompted backlash from the public. A proposed high voltage power line, known as the JETx project, would travel from Jamestown to Ellendale.

Otter Tail Power and Montana Dakota Utilities plan to jointly construct and operate the transmission line, which is waiting on a permit decision from the state Public Service Commission.

"Our future is dependent upon these transmission lines which support our energy sector," the lawmaker said. "Without progress in this state, how are we going to keep our young people here?"

Michael Berg, a fourth-generation farmer in Oliver and Mercer counties, is a member of those younger generations who left his career in the energy industry to work his family's farm. He told lawmakers he just wants companies to be transparent with local landowners and communities when they begin considering a project in the area, rather than operating in the shadows.

"Most farmers and ranchers, I would say, are in the business of farming and ranching and not developing industry on their farmland," Berg said. "However, I'm witnessing that these developments and these projects are not always following that transparency model."

That's not an uncommon situation for landowners, Perdue said.

"Development conversations can often leave residents feeling unheard and often leave developers feeling as though landowners and local stakeholders are unreasonably opposed," Perdue said. "I don't know all of the answers to that, but I know that we all can do a better job of being proactive and building conversations about those projects before they occur."

"A great track record" One project that has not had those differences with affected landowners is the Abercrombie Solar Project, according to a representative of Otter Tail Power. The solar project is being developed in Richland County, was approved by regulators last fall and is scheduled to begin construction this May.

Joe Hoppe, manager of legislative affairs for Otter Tail Power, said they

Drayton Rural Ambulance District
ANNUAL MEETING
Monday, March 9 - 7:00 pm
Merrill EMS and Fire Hall
105 Grant Ave, Drayton, ND
Quarterly board meeting to follow



Josh Dukart, a rancher in Oliver County, testifies to lawmakers about his mixed experience with infrastructure companies on his family's land during a Feb. 26 meeting of the Interim Energy Development and Transmission Committee. Photo by Jacob Orledge/North Dakota Monitor

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