

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA

SESSION 1997

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HOUSE BILL 1139  
Committee Substitute Favorable 8/21/97

Short Title: Rural Infrastructure Needs Study/Funds.

(Public)

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Sponsors:

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Referred to:

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April 21, 1997

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
2 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE STUDY COMMISSION ON RURAL  
3 INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS.

4 Whereas, most rural areas of North Carolina lack the water, wastewater, and  
5 natural gas infrastructure necessary to attract industry and foster economic development;  
6 and

7 Whereas, the lack of this basic infrastructure places rural areas at a distinct  
8 disadvantage in their efforts to attract new business and industry and to support  
9 expansions of existing business and industry; and

10 Whereas, of the 56 water and wastewater systems on moratorium and not  
11 permitting new connections, 45 of those systems are located in rural counties; and

12 Whereas, while recent legislation will likely result in the extension of natural  
13 gas service to most counties in North Carolina within a few years, many areas,  
14 particularly those rural counties in the far western and eastern sections of the State are not  
15 expected to benefit from natural gas extension for several years; and

16 Whereas, ongoing studies regarding water and wastewater infrastructure  
17 indicate that significant investments are needed in the rural counties to provide those  
18 services to areas yet unserved and to upgrade existing, failing water and wastewater  
19 systems; and

1           Whereas, the Highway Trust Fund will provide multilane highways to many  
2 rural areas in the next several years; and

3           Whereas, even the most sweeping improvements in education and workforce  
4 training cannot bring prosperity to rural areas without sufficient economic development  
5 to provide jobs for the rural workforce; Now, therefore,  
6 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

7  
8 Requested by: Representatives R. Hunter, Russell, Owens, Carpenter, Ramsey

9 **STUDY COMMISSION ON RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS**

10           Section 1. The Study Commission on Rural Infrastructure Needs is created.  
11 The Commission shall be a bipartisan body composed of 21 members, with seven  
12 members each appointed by the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives,  
13 and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate as follows:

- 14           (1) Two members of the Senate to be appointed by the Governor, at least  
15 one of whom shall be a member of the minority party in the Senate;
- 16           (2) Two members of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the  
17 Governor, at least one of whom shall be a member of the minority party  
18 in the House;
- 19           (3) Five members of the House to be appointed by the Speaker of the House  
20 of Representatives, at least two of whom shall be members of the  
21 minority party in the House;
- 22           (4) Five members of the Senate to be appointed by the President Pro  
23 Tempore of the Senate, at least two of whom shall be members of the  
24 minority party in the Senate;
- 25           (5) Seven members of the public, two to be appointed by the President Pro  
26 Tempore of the Senate, two to be appointed by the Speaker of the House  
27 of Representatives, and three to be appointed by the Governor.

28           In appointing the members of the Commission, each appointing authority shall  
29 consider the needs of all rural regions of the State and shall attempt to represent all those  
30 regions with their appointments. In addition, each appointing authority shall appoint at  
31 least one member residing in an urban area of the State.

32           All initial appointments shall be made within 45 days of the effective date of  
33 this act, and the Commission shall have its initial meeting no later than October 15, 1997.  
34 The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the  
35 Senate shall each designate a cochair from the General Assembly membership serving on  
36 the Commission. The Commission shall meet upon the call of the cochairs. A majority  
37 of the Commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

38           Section 2. The Commission shall:

- 39           (1) Identify and quantify the water and sewer and natural gas needs that the  
40 rural areas of North Carolina must meet in order to be competitive  
41 participants in the kind of economic development necessary for the  
42 balanced growth of the State; and

1           (2) Recommend both short-term and long-term funding solutions for  
2           ensuring that these needs are met.

3           In conducting its study, the Commission shall seek input from the North  
4 Carolina Rural Economic Development Center and other associations, agencies, and  
5 departments involved in rural economic development.

6           Section 3. The Commission may contract for consultant services as provided  
7 by G.S. 120-32.02. Upon approval of the Legislative Services Commission, the  
8 Legislative Services Officer shall assign professional and clerical staff to assist in the  
9 work of the Commission. Clerical staff shall be furnished to the Commission through the  
10 offices of the House and Senate Supervisors of Clerks. The Commission may meet in the  
11 Legislative Building or the Legislative Office Building upon the approval of the  
12 Legislative Services Commission. The Commission, while in the discharge of official  
13 duties, may exercise all the powers provided under the provisions of G.S. 120-19 through  
14 G.S. 120-19.4, including the power to request all officers, agents, agencies, and  
15 departments of the State to provide any information, data, or documents within their  
16 possession, ascertainable from their records, or otherwise available to them.

17           Members of the Commission shall receive per diem, subsistence, and travel  
18 allowances as follows:

19           (1) Commission members who are members of the General Assembly at the  
20 rate established in G.S. 120-3.1;

21           (2) Commission members who are officials or employees of the State or of  
22 local government agencies at the rate established in G.S. 138-6; and

23           (3) All other Commission members at the rate established in G.S. 138-5.

24           Section 4. The Commission shall report its findings and recommendations to  
25 the 1998 Regular Session of the 1997 General Assembly. In the event that the  
26 Commission needs more time to make final recommendations, it may make its final  
27 report to the 1999 General Assembly. The Commission shall terminate upon the filing of  
28 its final report.

29           Section 5. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the General  
30 Assembly the sum of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) for the 1997-98 fiscal year to fund  
31 the Study Commission on Rural Infrastructure Needs.

32           Section 6. This act is effective when it becomes law.