



# SIERRA CLUB

## NORTH STAR CHAPTER

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### Testimony to the House Tax Committee on HF5

**Peter Wagenius, Sierra Club North Star Chapter Legislative Director**

**February 26, 2025**

I'm Peter Wagenius, Legislative Director for Sierra Club's North Star Chapter representing 50,000 members and supporters working to help our state's communities flourish through environmental protection.

At 12:30 today I sent committee members a letter from Sierra Club and 15 other organizations who advocated for the historic 2023 Transportation Law.

Chair Zelle's willingness to "take one for the team" notwithstanding, the Governor's proposed ongoing \$32 million funding cut would drastically undermine the promised expansion of bus service and Bus Rapid Transit which was a centerpiece of 2023 Law. The same arguments in our coalition letter (**attached**) also apply to the even larger proposed cut in Section 8 on Page 9 of HF5, which would cut transit funding and redirect it to metro counties, some of whom aren't asking for this and all of whom already got an increase in 2023.

Just like the 2023 debate over the transit funding, the effort to redirect money to counties is also a sequel to the 2023 debate. Notably, two of the metro counties who would be recipients of this money already have authority from the legislature to raise their own revenue.

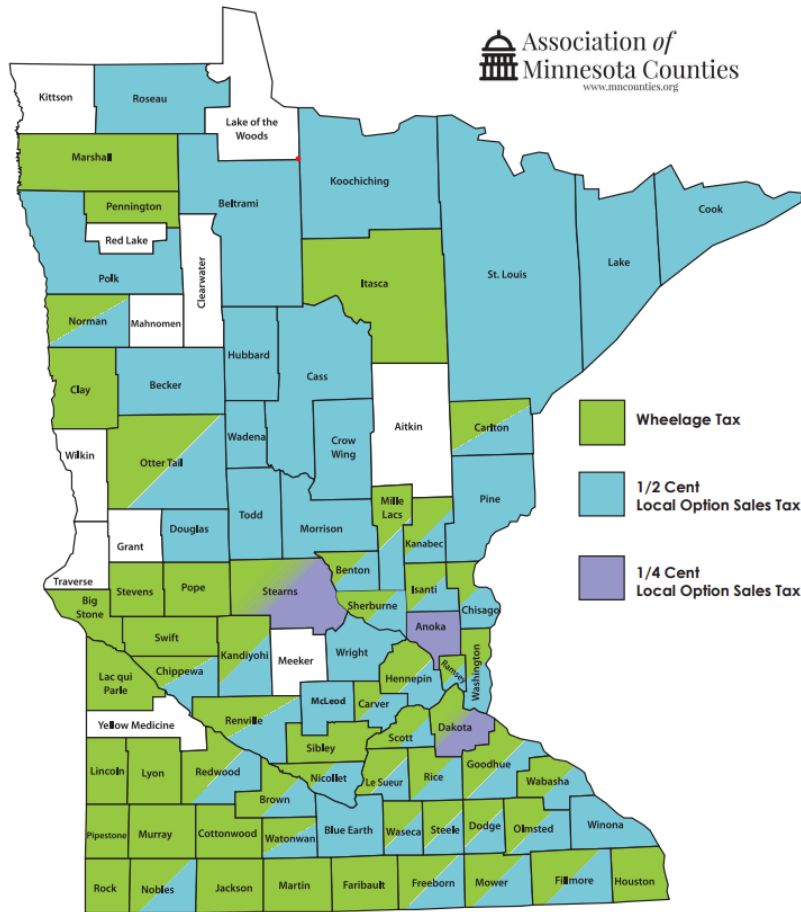
All counties in Minnesota have the ability to raise transportation dollars from two sources: a wheelage tax and a ½ cent sales tax. On this map, which the pages could share (attached below) you can see that many counties across the state have used the authorities the legislature provided.

But two metro counties had not used their authority in 2023. And still haven't. In effect those counties said to you that they wanted new revenue but didn't want to raise the revenue themselves. Those counties wanted you legislators to take the tough vote that they wouldn't take.

Transit riders don't have those options. They need your support. The Legislature in 2023 was right to reject a redirection away from transit.

## Local Option Taxes for Transportation

January 2025



Investing in Bus Rapid Transit works! In 2023 Former Chair Hornstein said that Minnesota could become the Capital of BRT in North America. That vision is not an exaggeration.

We have already **proven** with the A Line C Line and D Line that for **far less money** than rail, we can increase ridership with the greater frequency and the speed, reliability and basic amenities of BRT. Each of those three BRT lines achieved a 20% ridership increase and recovered their pre-pandemic ridership faster than the rest of the system. BRT embodies the *greater efficiency* that Rep Olson asked for.

“Bus neglect” is a nationwide problem. Many regions around the country fail to build effective transit systems either through overall lack of investment, or by building a two tiered system in which rail is supported but buses are not.

Minnesota is not immune from this nationwide problem. But we can catch up simply by replicating our own success. Regions all over the country have noticed our success with our first few BRT lines. Just as Minnesota is becoming a model for cost effective bus transit is not the time to undermine it.

We call on the Legislature to defend their 2023 victory and reject proposed rollbacks of the needed investments in public transit.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.