

February 14, 2025

Chair Koznick and Members of the Transportation Committee:

AFSCME Council 5 represents over 43,000 public and private sector workers in Minnesota, including workers at MNDOT and DPS: Driver and Vehicle Services. We advocate for excellence in services for the public, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all workers.

There are several bills being heard today in committee that AFSCME Council 5 has a position on. We are supportive of the provisions in HF 189 to increase the surcharge on various electric vehicles, for distribution to the Highway User Tax Distribution Fund. As both an issue of fairness and practicality, having electric vehicle drivers pay for using the roads like other drivers makes sense and helps to maintain the roads and bridges we use every day. We also support having an equitable inflationary increase to the EV surcharge if other fuel taxes increase as well. However, we are opposed to shifting dollars from the general fund on top of these revenue raisers to the HUTDF. Between a challenging imbalance for the state budget in future years, and the potential of dramatic cuts in federal funding to state agencies, these shifts will hamper other agencies' ability to keep up an acceptable level of service for the public. That's not to say that we oppose further investment in transportation or MNDOT; far from it. But we can't rob Peter to pay Paul, and unfortunately several provisions in this bill do just that.

To that point, we are opposed to HF 305, which would shift the revenue generated from blackout plates from DVS to the HUTDF. DVS has significantly fewer levers to pull for generating revenue to pay for the services we all need like drivers license exams, vehicle title transfers, issuing license plates, and regulating auto dealers. Shifting any funds away from DVS will further jeopardize the progress they've made on completing timely road tests, at a time that DVS could use substantially more resources (particularly in the metro) to meet the statutory two-week period to get an exam. Again, this isn't to say that the HUTDF doesn't need more resources to address the backlog in road and bridge maintenance, just that taking resources away from another department isn't the way to meet that need.

Finally, we are opposed to HF 303, which allows transit operators to utilize third party testers to administer their road exams. Road exams are a core function of the state, and the legislature needs to ensure that workers who administer the exams have no financial incentives to pass students that aren't ready to operate a vehicle alone. This is an issue of ensuring safety and integrity, at a moment that fraud, waste, and abuse are being heavily targeted, and rightly so. Third party testing opens a very straightforward avenue for the opportunity for fraud, and we shouldn't go down that road. We are particularly concerned that the legislature would move this direction when we have just finally increased DVS's capacity to perform road tests for the first time in several years. We surely aren't at the finish line, but our members are proud of the progress we've made.

Thank you for considering our comments on these bills.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ethan Vogel".

Ethan Vogel  
Legislative Director