



HENNEPIN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
A-2400 GOVERNMENT CENTER
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55487-0240

May 5, 2021

Representative Frank Hornstein
Representative Erin Koegel
Representative Luke Frederick
Representative Steve Elkins
Representative John Petersburg

Senator Scott Newman
Senator John Jasinski
Senator Jeff Howe
Senator David Osmeck
Senator Karla Bigham

Dear Members of the Omnibus Transportation Conference Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners to express our position on provisions in the House and Senate Omnibus Transportation Bills. We thank you for the opportunity to submit comments and greatly appreciate your work and leadership this session to advance funding for a multi-modal transportation system.

Comprehensive Sustainable Transportation Funding in House Bill

Hennepin County has partnered with other counties to make significant investments with our local tax dollars to build and operate the metro's light rail, bus rapid transit, and commuter rail system. That system serves one-third of all transit rides in the metro, has secured over \$2.5 billion dollars in federal funds to our state, and supported thousands of well-paying construction jobs.

However, much like for roads and bridges, local funding alone cannot meet the need for an equitable and efficient transit system. Sustainable, long-term transit funding will resolve the Metropolitan Council's structural funding gap to operate and maintain the system and allow for transformational improvements in the bus system, like through build out of Arterial Bus Rapid Transit Lines, that will better serve communities that have been historically subject to underinvestment of public resources. This moment calls for sustainable, long-term funding solution to deliver a more equitable, high-quality transit to underserved communities, better connect people with jobs, reduce carbon emissions, and continue to build a thriving economy. We support the House bill's half-cent sales tax for the Met Council and oppose the Senate bill's near elimination of the Met Council's base funding to fund transit and Metro Mobility.

The State's multi-modal road and bridge system also needs increased, dedicated revenue to ensure Minnesota has a safe and modern transportation system. Additional state funding would increase revenue to the County State Aid Highway system which is critical to offset the

challenges of our aging infrastructure, help counties meet critical maintenance needs, and reduce pressure on local property taxes. This funding will also help counties improve accessibility compliance by improving access to all residents. We support the increase in constitutionally dedicated revenue in the House bill including indexing the gas tax, increasing the rate of the motor vehicle sales tax, and changes to the depreciation schedule for registration fees. We also support increased funding for the Local Bridge Replacement and Local Road Improvement programs. Significant increases in state funding are critical to prevent continued degradation of our infrastructure, provide an effective transportation system and maintain Minnesota's economic competitiveness.

County Responsibility for Guideways: Senate Bill, Article 4, Sec. 3

We oppose the guideway proposal in the Senate bill that would remove local control of locally raised tax dollars and would make counties legally responsible for all costs to build, operate, and maintain transit guideways not covered by other sources. Counties would lose fiscal oversight and leverage to negotiate costs with the Met Council, and instead, county resources would serve as a blank check for the Met Council's wants and needs. The lack of control over local tax dollars would also inhibit our ability to continue to expand and improve the system that currently serves over one-third of all metro transit riders. The result would be to undo the longstanding partnership between counties and the Met Council that has allowed our region's transit system to make transformative improvements.

Highway 55 Transit Improvement Study: House Bill, Article 1, Sec. 3

Highway 55 is a key artery for the economic vitality of the western region of Hennepin County and the corridor needs transit and safety improvements to provide better access to jobs, services, and affordable housing. The corridor serves a large transit-reliant community and has been identified as having a strong reverse commute between north Minneapolis and communities along the Blue Line Extension and employment in the cities of Plymouth and Golden Valley. Stakeholders and the local communities are ready to take the next step to advance the significant planning that has occurred along the corridor. We support the House bill's investment to study transit service improvements in the Highway 55 corridor from Medina to downtown Minneapolis.

Sustainable Transportation Initiatives and Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Investment in House Bill

Vehicle transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Minnesota and despite more fuel-efficient vehicles we have made little progress over the last two decades to reduce emissions. Climate change and transportation pollution more acutely affect our most vulnerable residents. Data show that communities of color, low income families, and residents with disabilities are the most impacted by negative climate impacts, like flooding events, heat waves, and poor air quality. Many of these communities are surrounded and bisected by the highest volume roadways and suffer disproportionately from vehicle pollution. We support the House bill's sustainable transportation initiatives to reduce vehicle miles traveled by 20 percent by 2050, expand electric vehicle charging infrastructure, work with the Metropolitan Council on

the goal to transition the transit fleet to zero emission by 2040, and prioritize investments in the preservation and maintenance of our trunk highway system.

Northstar Commuter Rail Termination: Senate Bill, Article 4, Sec. 8

We oppose the termination of the Northstar commuter rail service in the Senate bill. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on worker commute habits across the state, as thousands of Minnesotans lost their jobs or were forced to work from home. Now is not the time to make long-term decisions about the future of this vital service for thousands of Minnesotans.

Metro County Local Option Sales Tax Report: Senate Bill, Article 2, Sec. 54

The Senate bill singles out metro counties that have implemented a county transportation sales and use tax to provide an annual report to the Commissioner of Transportation on the use of this revenue. Current law requires counties to hold public hearings and designate how the proceeds of the taxes will be spent. We believe the county use of locally raised tax dollars is publicly provided and metro counties should not be subject to additional requirements when more than half of Minnesota's counties impose a local transportation sales and use tax.

We greatly appreciate your efforts this session and your work ahead to negotiate a compromise. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marion Greene". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Marion Greene, Chair
Hennepin County Board of Commissioners