

HENNEPIN COUNTY

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

May 2, 2023

Representative Hornstein
Representative Koegel
Representative Tabke
Representative Brand
Representative Petersburg

Senator Dibble
Senator Morrison
Senator Carlson
Senator McEwen
Senator Jasinski

Dear Members of the 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. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments. We greatly appreciate your work and leadership this session to advance funding for our multi-modal transportation system.

Dedicated transit funding

We support dedicated transit funding with $\frac{3}{4}$ cent metro sales tax to cover operating shortfalls and make transformational improvements to better serve communities that have seen historical underinvestment of public resources. Every Minnesotan will benefit from quality transit, which saves people time and money whether they take the bus/train or drive on less congested roads. A more robust and reliable system will help car commuters spend less time in traffic and will aid businesses through increased access to workforce. The transportation sector is also the single greatest source of climate emissions and other particulates in our air. We support increased transit investment and climate mitigation efforts to enable Minnesotans to reduce individual car use and cut emissions.

Blue Line LRT Extension funding

We support the Senate's position of \$50 million for the Blue Line Extension. The Blue Line Extension LRT will connect Brooklyn Park, through Crystal, Robbinsdale, North Minneapolis to downtown Minneapolis and the broader transit network. It is a generational investment in our transit system that will serve the most transit-reliant, racially diverse communities in the state, and help leverage nearly a billion dollars from the federal government for Minnesota. This project will employ thousands of good paying construction jobs and ignite economic development unlike any other form of infrastructure.

Equitable metro transportation funding

Hennepin County residents greatly subsidize the state and metro Collar Counties' transportation needs. We support equitable metro transportation funding by fixing the Motor Vehicle Lease Sales Tax distribution. The five metro "Collar Counties" are the only counties in the state that receive a special pot of transportation funding. From 2018-2022, more than \$162 million in MVLST was collected in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, with virtually none coming back. In the same five years, Collar Counties received \$186 million in MVLST revenues. Without equitable metro transportation funding, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties is forced to defer maintenance and raise property taxes to maintain our system and offer transportation alternatives to combat climate emissions.

New revenue for the multi-modal transportation system

We support the revenue raisers in the bill dedicated to maintaining a safe and modern multimodal transportation system. Additional state funding for the County State Aid Highway system is needed to help maintain county roads and bridge systems. Hennepin County has the greatest need (\$1.28 billion) of all 87 counties and maintains the largest roadway system of any county in the state with 2,200 lane miles of roadway, 450 miles of bikeways, and 340 miles of sidewalks, 148 bridges, 792 traffic signals and more than 23,000 drainage structures/systems. Roughly one third of our transportation system is more than 50 years old.

Active Transportation and Safe Routes to Schools

We support the funding included for the Active Transportation program and Safe Routes to Schools. These programs improve safety on our transportation system by reducing fatalities and serious injuries from vehicle crashes and increasing access for all users by investing in ADA, walking, biking, and rolling improvements.

Met Council Governance

The Met Council is critical to the success of our region and to tackle the significant challenges we face in building a more equitable economy and tackling climate change. The Met Council's core functions are regional services with regional stakeholders, but the Met Council's current structure makes it beholden to statewide politics and statewide interests. We support the efforts to restructure the governance of the Met Council to increase its credibility, accountability, and effectiveness as the regional transit planner. We support increased financial accountability by using the metro sales tax to fund all transitway operational costs, capital maintenance costs, and a portion of all transitway capital costs.

Transit Safety

Safety is a key component in the delivery of a quality transit system. Incidents of harassment and crime on the transit system compromise riders' sense of safety and discourage people from using transit, which can lead to decreased ridership and even greater sense of risk. We support the efforts to improve safety on the system but are concerned about the House's position to require "county-based social workers" to serve on intervention teams because it will take them away from responding to other critical and closely connected work, like encampment outreach, which could only exacerbate the problem. Instead, we support the Senate position to use community-based organizations to provide the service.

Northside Service Center

We support the provision in the senate bill to expand the Hennepin County North Minneapolis Service Center to a full-service deputy registrar office.

Sincerely,



Irene Fernando, Chair
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