



March 2, 2022

Dear Chair Hornstein and House Transportation Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the future of the Corridors of Commerce program.

The Minnesota Transportation Alliance was involved in the creation of this program and we continue to believe that the goals of program are important. The state faced a situation where major highway improvement projects were languishing for decades because the cost of the project made it difficult for the MnDOT district to include the project in its work plan without the project taking up the vast majority of the budget and leaving little for all of the rest of the district needs.

These major highway projects needed special attention and so the Corridors of Commerce program was created. We believe that there is still a need to have a funding program that is specifically designed to address major projects rather than a program that mirrors the spending and priorities of the regular state construction program.

M.S. 161.088 states the goal of the Corridors of Commerce program: improve commerce in the state.

The statute provides two major categories of spending: 1) Capacity Development to provide more continuity within corridors, avoiding the two-lane to four-lane to two-lane inconsistencies and 2) Freight Improvement that remove barriers to commerce, ease freight movement, support emerging industries or provide intermodal connections for the movement of freight.

We believe these should continue to be the major categories for the Corridors of Commerce program.

In reviewing the process that was used in 2018 to solicit, score and rank projects for this program, we can see that while 174 projects were submitted, a limited number of corridors were involved with multiple projects within those corridors: I-94, I-35, I694&I494, I-90, 169, 62, 65, 55, 77, 13, 252, 97, 61, 36, 101, 8, 212, 5,23, 71, 14, 33,10, 371, 210, 2, 53, 52.

One way to simplify the process of scoring projects and developing cost estimates while also giving legislators input into the process would be for the legislature and MnDOT to work on identifying a list of corridors that are considered Corridors of Commerce. That would provide clarity while also focusing the program on major corridors that are clearly important for the movement of freight. The statute requires projects funded through Corridors of Commerce to be an Interregional Corridor (IRC). The IRC system and Corridors of Commerce system could be the same and would form the backbone of the trunk highway system.

Since 1893

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The ATPs and other stakeholders could submit individual projects and improvements within the identified Corridors of Commerce which would be reviewed and ranked when funding is available. Another way to reduce the amount of work involved would be to develop a list for a 2-4 year timeframe so that it will be clear which projects are next in line and how far a particular amount of funding will go in addressing the list of projects.

Our members support the idea of having ATPs submitting projects to the department and legislators have the ability to provide input to the ATPs. We also believe that MnDOT District staff, with their knowledge and experience, should be consulted in project selection. Every project should be valued for ROI with an emphasis on high-impact improvements such as regional connections and completion of corridor projects.

Metro counties are willing to assist with coordinating with project applicants in those counties before submitting projects to MnDOT. This will not limit the number of applications, but make sure they meet local government priorities.

Another option would be for Metro counties to screen projects in their county and submit two from each county. There could also be a small and large category as proposed in Greater Minnesota.

At the end of the day, the Corridors of Commerce program will be more effective and efficient if stable, dependable funding is provided. Similar to the Local Bridge Replacement program, maintaining a master list of projects for this program and funding the program every year would allow local governments, stakeholders and MnDOT to better plan and construct projects through the Corridors of Commerce program.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to funding highway improvements that improve freight movement and commerce in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Margaret Donahoe
Executive Director