

## MnDOT Policy Bill - 2026 Legislative Session

MnDOT's 2026 policy proposals advance the agency's mission to plan, build, operate and maintain a safe, accessible, efficient, and reliable multimodal transportation system that connects people to destinations and markets throughout the state, regionally, and around the world. The agency strives to achieve its mission through its core values: safety, excellence, service, integrity, accountability, and diversity and inclusion.

### Streamlining Bill

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MnDOT's technical bill addresses policies to help streamline operations, increase efficiencies, and clarify ambiguities, across the following areas:

#### 1. Piney Pinecreek Airport References Removed (5502, 26-06037)

All references in statute to Piney Pinecreek Border Airport (48Y) will be removed due to its permanent closure last year.



The Piney Pinecreek Border Airport is located partially in Minnesota and Canada, over the international border. The airport was operated jointly by the State of Minnesota and the Rural Municipality of Piney, Manitoba for more than 70 years. In June 2024, Canada exercised their right to withdraw from the international agreement. After extensive stakeholder engagement on both sides, the international agreement expired in December 2024 and was not renewed. This proposal removes the statutory language that is no longer needed after the closing of the airport.

#### 2. MRSI Technical Changes (5507, 26-06041)

During the 2025 Legislative Session, stakeholders—including the Minnesota Regional Railroads Association— raised questions regarding available funding for Minnesota Rail Service Improvement (MRSI) program activities, particularly the use of funds for loans.

Currently, Statute 222.50 does not reference these two accounts, nor does it adequately describe the loan component of the program. The proposed changes will explicitly identify the two accounts and provide clear statutory language regarding the longstanding role of loans with MRSI. This proposal is not controversial; the alternative is to leave the language as is.

#### 3. Prohibition from Silencing Railroad Crossing Bells (5511, 26-06044)

Bells at grade crossings provide an important safety function for all users, offering clear and consistent auditory warnings; they are especially critical for individuals with low vision, who may rely on sound when visual cues are limited or unavailable. Even in designated quiet zones—where train horns are not sounded—bells remain active and must be maintained in good working order, per 49 CFR Part 222.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has received a small number of requests to silence bells at certain crossings throughout the state. None of the requests have been approved due to site-specific conditions. This issue has also been examined in several recent national forums, where the consensus supports the state's position. Ensuring pedestrian and traveler safety remains a top priority and a fundamental component of quality-of-life considerations.

Minnesota Statute 219.14 gives the commissioner the authority to establish proper warning protocols at highway-rail grade crossings. The proposal would prohibit the commissioner from ordering or allowing the silencing of crossing bells.

#### **4. Updating Cost Threshold on Major Project Reporting (5512, 26-06045)**

Modify the cost threshold on Major Project Reporting in Statute 174.56 in Subd 1(b). (Enacted in 2008 at \$25M metro, \$10M GM and then reduced in 2012 to \$15M metro and \$5M GM)

- Modify the threshold from \$15M on Metro projects to \$30M
- Modify the threshold from \$5M on non-Metro projects to \$15M

In its current format, the statute requires MnDOT to report on nearly every state funded road construction project, including simple mill-and-overlay preservation work that would not typically be considered a major project. Updating the cost thresholds would allow the legislature to narrow the focus to significant projects while reducing the resources MnDOT must devote to reporting. There has been substantial inflation since the thresholds were first established, the updated limits would better match the intended definition of a major project. Additionally, these proposed cost thresholds coincide well with MnDOT's internal definition of major projects that are considered by the agency's Major Projects Leadership Team.

#### **5. Remove Inactive Designated Trail (5517, 26-06048)**

In 1964, Governors from four states, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, promoted a new tourist trail, the Hiawatha Pioneer Trail. This trail was created to connect tourist locations in the four states and signs were installed along the route.

In 1965 Minn Statute 161.14 subd. 12 was established for the Hiawatha Pioneer Trail and in 1969 an alternate route was added. This statute requires the commissioner of transportation to adopt a sign to mark or blaze the highways.

By 2008 all four states stopped supporting this trail and removed their roadway signs for Hiawatha Pioneer Trail. Removing Minn. Statute subd. 12 and subd. 12a from statute would eliminate MnDOT's obligation to mark the highway for an inactive trail.

## Substantive Bill

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MnDOT's substantive bill has changes to statute that are more in-depth than those that just streamline and make processes more efficient.

### **1. Update to Bridge Statute, Minn Statute 165 (5503, 26-06038)**

The proposed changes to Statute 165 are necessary so Minnesota law is consistent with the recent update to Federal law (National Bridge Inspection Standards (Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations Part 650)). MnDOT is aligning the statute on bridge inspections to Federal standards and embracing the risk-based inspection interval approach. This allows proper allocation of inspection resources to focus on higher-risk bridges. MnDOT is also proposing to clarify the definitions of bridges, add requirements for tunnel inspections, and remove redundancies in reporting.

### **2. Modernization of Legislatively Mandated Reports (5506, 26-06040)**

MnDOT is subject to many reporting requirements each year. Producing these reports— writing, editing, formatting, creating maps, etc.- costs the department about \$1 million annually. MnDOT must also pay to store those reports in our eDocs system, which adds to the costs. Many reports are required in statute in perpetuity.

This proposal would set time limits on reporting requirements, allowing outdated reports to be modernized or eliminated. Core plans, such as the rail plan, bike plan, and statewide multimodal transportation plan, would remain. If legislators wish to continue a report beyond its sunset date, they could introduce a bill to extend it or create a new report with updated information.

### **3. Authorize MnDOT to enter into Public-Private Partnerships for Truck Parking (5510, 26-06043)**

Minnesota has a truck parking shortage that has created significant challenges for truck drivers to find a safe place to rest. In fact, there are over 26,000 long haul truck trips per day in Minnesota and only 4,846 publicly accessible truck parking spaces available.

This proposal would authorize MnDOT to enter into public-private partnerships for truck parking spaces, technology or improvements that provide a public safety benefit. These partnerships would supplement and support, but not replace, the existing rest area parking capacity. The Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee supports this policy proposal.

This language authorizes MnDOT to engage in public-private partnerships with businesses, local governments and others. This proposal would clarify the language from 2023 (in omnibus bill) and provide explicit authorization.

### **4. Active Transportation Program Safety Education Flexibility (5515, 26-06051)**

This proposal allows greater flexibility in how the program supports non-infrastructure offerings. Currently the first \$500,000 appropriated for the program must fund active transportation safety curriculum for youth ages 5-14, and if funds remain for youth ages 15-17, adult safety programming, and adult learn-to-ride programming.

This proposal updates the language in 174.38, subd. 6 (b) changing the allocation from a fixed \$500,000 to 10% of program funds. It also replaces language specifying “grants” with “programming,” allowing for broader delivery methods. These changes enable MnDOT to pursue approaches that efficiently deliver benefits to communities.

#### **5. Remove Scenic Byways from Names and Designations of Certain Highways Statute (5518, 26-06049)**

The National Scenic Byway Program was established in 1991 in federal legislation and the Minnesota Scenic Byways Commission was established the following year in 1992. Prior to this time, three scenic byways were included in state statute and a fourth was added in 2001. Each of these byways carries specific signing requirements, ranging from bronze plaques to roadway signs maintained by road authorities.

In 1996, Minn. Statute 161.139 (Highway Designation Costs) was enacted, requiring nonstate sources to cover all costs related to designing, erecting and maintaining legislatively designated signs on or after January 1, 1996. In 2009, the date “on or after January 1, 1996” was removed from statute and it now includes all highway designations regardless of when they were established in Minn. Statute.

Although MnDOT has received federal funds for replacing the signs on scenic byways, those funds often require a state funding match. However, Minn. Statute 161.139 prohibits state funds for designated roadway signs. Removing the four scenic byways from Minn. Stat. §161.14 would eliminate this conflict, allowing state funds to be used when necessary.

The Minnesota Scenic Byways Commission manages 22 scenic byways but only four are currently in state statute. Removing these four from statute would ensure consistent management of all scenic byways signs.