

May 3, 2021

Sen. Scott Newman, Chair, Senate Transportation Committee
Rep. Frank Hornstein, Chair, House Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
Sen. John Jasinski, Vice Chair, Senate Transportation Committee
Rep. Erin Koegel, Vice Chair, House Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
Sen. Jeff Howe
Sen. David Osmek
Sen. Karla Bigham
Rep. Steve Elkins
Rep. Luke Frederick
Rep. John Petersburg

(Sent via electronic delivery)

Dear Senate and House Transportation Omnibus Finance bill conferees,

Thank you for your service on the transportation omnibus bill conference committee. We appreciate the hard work you will put in to negotiating a compromise that will fund transportation across the state of Minnesota for the next two years. We hope that we can provide helpful input on which proposals best position Minnesota for a prosperous present and future.

First, we strongly support two finance provisions in the House language: (a) the **half cent sales tax in the transit taxing district** for transit and active transportation purposes, and (b) the **increase in the motor vehicle sales tax**, which brings the rate to the same level as any other sales tax paid in Minnesota. These new, sustainable dollars will provide a solid foundation for building out a transit and active transportation system that is fair and just for all Minnesotans and advances the state's climate goals.

We are grateful to both the House and Senate for the inclusion of provisions to **forecast spending on Metro Mobility services in future biennia**. This will provide certainty for this critical and federally mandated service to Minnesotans and will simplify the budget process. We are glad to see that this bipartisan recommendation from the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Metropolitan Governance passed with strong support in both chambers, and encourage its inclusion in the final bill.

We also strongly support the House provisions that address **sustainability in our transportation system**. The House language recognizes the need to reduce statewide vehicle miles traveled by 20 percent and that we will need different strategies for urban and rural Minnesota; requires that electric, low-emission buses be used to serve areas where air pollution has disproportionately negative health effects on Minnesotans; and prioritizes fixing our existing road infrastructure over expansion. These provisions address the consensus that we need to act urgently to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that we will not be able to achieve our climate goals through electrification alone.

Although language on **administrative citations for fare non-payment and the transit ambassador program** is not included in the Senate provisions, we were glad to hear that Chair Newman is amenable to a conversation on this important issue. We can make critical progress with the parking-ticket-style administrative citations and supportive, non-police transit representatives. We would urge the conference committee to amend the language in the bill, however, to completely remove language from statute that allows fare non-payment to be charged as a misdemeanor crime. Two systems of justice where one person could receive an administrative citation for not paying a fare and another—on the same train—could find themselves arrested and

even prosecuted with a criminal misdemeanor sets the stage for discriminatory enforcement. We will look to continuing conversations during conference committee proceedings.

There are a few provisions in the Senate language we hope you will reconsider. We strongly oppose the drastic cuts to base funding for transit operations and Metro Mobility services. The federal funds provided to the Met Council for financial relief due to lost fare revenue and necessary service reductions should be used not just to backfill Metro Transit's deficit and work on their maintenance backlog, but also to innovate and provide robust service to reach potential new transit commuters who may now question the need to own a car and manage all of its associated costs. It is now more important than ever to reduce household transportation costs and put money in Minnesotan's pockets to start new businesses, pay a mortgage, or provide opportunities for families and children.

We also urge you to reconsider the termination of the Northstar commuter service. Metro Transit is ready for riders. Their leadership recently decided to increase capacity limits on buses and train cars and urge commuters to travel responsibly instead of limiting use of transit to essential trips only. The elimination of the Northstar service proposed by the Senate would be ill-timed as offices begin to re-open and recreational venues begin to open for limited crowds. In addition, Northstar's utility will continue to increase in the years ahead: new connections to SWLRT, downtown Bus Rapid Transit lines like the D, and a future Bottineau extension will expand the opportunities Northstar commuters can access. We should not be removing Northstar as an option for commuters, even as interest in extending the line north to St. Cloud remains strong.

Finally, the re-structuring of MnPass revenue spending in the bill does not square with our state's needs. By placing transit at the end of the line for receiving revenues after operations and maintenance of MnPass corridors, it is unlikely any dollars would remain for transit planning purposes. This defeats one of the primary purposes of the MnPass system for transportation demand management—to reduce congestion in highly trafficked corridors by working to boost transit use in those areas of the Metro. Move Minnesota advocates for use of highway user tax distribution fund dollars on these corridors for further development of the bus rapid transit network in addition to the current MnPass revenues.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Sobotka
Director of Policy and Research



Sam Rockwell
Executive Director

Move Minnesota is the leading advocacy organization for expanding transit and active transportation access in our state. We are an active member and leader in the Transportation Forward Coalition, which brings together advocacy groups who seek to expand and improve our transportation system.