



May 7, 2021

Governor Tim Walz  
Speaker of the House Melissa Hortman  
Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka  
House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt  
Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent

(Sent via electronic delivery)

Dear Governor Walz and legislative leaders,

As conference committees commence and you begin final negotiations with House and Senate leadership on the biennial budget, we as advocates for the disability community urge you to include the half-cent metro-area transit sales tax provision in the House bill as part of a final deal. We know that NOW is the time to make critical transit investments with the power to improve daily life for Minnesota families, to protect our climate, to expand access to jobs and resources, and to create a better future for all of us in a post-COVID world.

The need for an expanded transit system is clear. We need more transit service and supportive bicycling, walking, and rolling connections in order to meet many of our state's goals: to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2050; to make Minnesota the best state in the country to raise a family; and to meet our moral obligation to address the inequalities Minnesotans currently face based on race, income, and ability. Providing the reliable funds from a dedicated half-cent sales tax for transit now, combined with the one-time federal funds we've received from recent national relief packages, ensures that we will be well on our way to building out a comprehensive system in the metro area that:

- Ensures transit service is faster, more frequent, more convenient, more sustainable, and more reliable for people throughout the Twin Cities;
- Attracts new transit riders and dramatically improves the lives of Minnesotans who currently rely on transit;
- Rolls out on a timeline that can successfully meet urgent climate and equity goals; and
- Improves transit access and coverage within the 694/494 beltway, enabling more metro residents to easily use transit to meet their everyday needs and realistically forgo car ownership.

**Transit ensures people of all abilities can lead their best lives.** When all of us can get around, it shows all of us are valued. For people with disabilities, transit is an essential service—and we hear from members of the disability community consistently that access to safe, reliable transportation and transit service is their top advocacy concern. It provides access to work, to get an education, to visit with family and friends, to be

independent. When transit is lacking and streets are inaccessible, getting around becomes a barrier that makes all this harder, and at times impossible. A half cent sales tax, combined with the recently received federal COVID relief is the minimum of what would be needed to build out a transit system that would adequately serve the disability community. Any cuts to the base funding for Metro Mobility and transit operations would be devastating to the system and hinder transit use at a time when we have the best opportunity to innovate it.

A half-cent sales tax does not put Minnesota at the front of the pack on transit investments across the United States—and should be considered the minimum acceptable investment in 2021. In fact, we are rapidly falling behind other major metropolitan areas when it comes to transit investments. Cities like Seattle, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, and Houston all impose transit sales taxes of at least a penny. We need additional investments to just to keep pace.

We stand with you, ready to applaud your dedication to improving the lives of Minnesotans through a significant investment in transit. In what will no doubt be a difficult negotiation on new revenues, we think a modest sales tax increase, limited to the area where Minnesotans will benefit from it most, will be a winning compromise.

Sincerely,

Trevor Turner, Public Policy Director, Minnesota Council on Disability

Julia Burkstaller, Public Policy Director, The Arc Minnesota

Jeff Nachbar, Public Policy Director, Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance

*With the support of:* Sam Rockwell, Executive Director, Move Minnesota

Cc: Rep. Frank Hornstein, House Transportation Committee Chair

Sen. Scott Newman, Senate Transportation Committee Chair

Chris Schmitter, Chief of Staff to Governor Walz

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