

February 25, 2022

Margaret Anderson Kelliher
Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Transportation

Charlie Zelle
Board Chair
Metropolitan Council

Nancy Daubenberger
Incoming Interim Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Transportation

Mary Bogie
Regional Administrator
Metropolitan Council

CC:
Tim Walz
Governor
State of Minnesota

Frank Hornstein
Representative and Chair
Transportation Finance and Policy Committee

Scott Newman
Senator and Chair
Transportation Finance and Policy Committee

RE: Letter From Minnesota Organizations Calling on MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council To Follow US DOT Guidance on Investing Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill Money Equitably & Sustainably

Dear State and Regional Transportation Leaders:

In November, Congress passed and the President signed the largest ever investment in our nation's public transit systems. The bipartisan infrastructure bill gives Minnesota, as well as cities and states across the country, access to historic levels of funding that will create good-paying jobs and make communities safer, more environmentally sustainable, and racially just. The infrastructure projects made possible by these investments can begin to ensure safe, reliable, and accessible transportation for everyone, no matter where they live.

We are writing to call your attention to new guidance from the U.S. Department of Transportation on how to spend these funds. The [memorandum](#) sets clear expectations for how to prioritize new investments in a way that makes our communities safer, more accessible, sustainable, and equitable.

To achieve these goals and solve our transportation problems, we have to stop expanding highways and embrace the full range of solutions that federal funding can support. MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council have the flexibility to spend federal funds on public transit systems, solutions that reduce air pollution and address the climate crisis, complete streets projects, accessibility improvements for people with disabilities

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and those with limited mobility, uniting neighborhoods separated by freeways, and improved transit access for rural and Tribal communities.

We call on you to spend these funds in a way that helps Minnesota become more equitable and sustainable. U.S. DOT outlined investments and projects that will help “Build a Better America,” including:

- improve the condition, resilience and safety of road and bridge assets consistent with asset management plans (including investing in the preservation of those assets);
- promote and improve safety for all road users, particularly vulnerable users;
- at a minimum, make streets and other transportation facilities accessible to all users and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- address environmental impacts ranging from stormwater runoff to greenhouse gas emissions;
- prioritize infrastructure that is less vulnerable and more resilient to a changing climate;
- future-proof our transportation infrastructure by accommodating new and emerging technologies like electric vehicle charging stations, renewable energy generation, and broadband deployment in transportation rights-of-way;
- reconnect communities and reflect the inclusion of disadvantaged and under-represented groups in the planning, project selection and design process; and
- direct Federal funds to their most efficient and effective use, consistent with these objectives.

We especially stress the importance of investing in public transit systems, including bus rapid transit and more electric buses in both urban and Greater Minnesota. We know that abundant transit unlocks freedom of movement and dramatically increases access to opportunity. When people can count on the bus or train to get where they need to go, they can easily access jobs, education, medical care, culture, goods and services, and the daily life of their communities. They benefit from greater economic mobility and lower household costs. Transportation systems that maximize people’s access to good transit are necessarily inclusive, without barriers linked to race, income, age, or ability. And because transit is resource-efficient and supports low-emissions neighborhoods, it’s also an indispensable tool to prevent climate change, clean our air, and protect public health.

Today our transportation systems fall short of what’s needed to build healthy, thriving, economically resilient communities. The Environmental Protection Agency reports that “Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation accounts for about 29 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making it the largest contributor of U.S. GHG emissions.” This reality is also reflected in Minnesota, where transportation is also the highest-emitting sector, accounting for about a quarter of our emissions. Racial bias and neglect in historical transportation policy built freeways carrying fossil fuel-emitting cars and trucks through historically marginalized neighborhoods. This perpetuates racial and income inequality, limits economic opportunity, hastens catastrophic climate change, and exacerbates chronic disease, adding to disparate health outcomes for those communities. Expanding freeways disrupts and fragments habitat, resulting in biodiversity loss.

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You have an historic opportunity to change the status quo of transportation planning to build good public transit systems that meet the needs of the communities they serve. Americans need transit that is:

- **Equitable.** America's car-based transportation system erects barriers to mobility that reinforce long term social inequities. Investments should remove these barriers and prioritize the needs of Black and brown people, people with low incomes, and people with disabilities.
- **Sustainable.** The transportation sector is the number one emitter of greenhouse gases in the U.S. To avert severe climate change, public transit use must increase. Investments should significantly expand access to good transit service so that people can easily make the switch from cars to transit.
- **Economically productive.** As cities and rural communities alike recover from the pandemic, ensuring people have safe and reliable ways to get to work, school, and shopping is critical. Investments should make service more abundant, frequent, fast, and reliable to increase economic opportunity and productivity. Improving public transit also generates more good-paying jobs operating, maintaining, and supplying transit systems.
- **Safe and accessible.** Many factors in addition to scarce service limit access to transit, including dangerous streets, discriminatory policing, and the lack of elevators at stations. Investments should eliminate the full range of limitations and achieve broad-based safety and universal access.
- **Affordable.** Access to transit should never be contingent on one's ability to pay. Investments should establish programs that provide fare relief for everyone who needs it.

As you create your budget and capital plan for the coming year, and the five years of funding from the IIJA, we strongly urge you to follow the U.S. Department of Transportation's guidance for investing these new federal dollars to build better public transit and a transportation system that works for all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

move
MINNESOTA
Sam Rockwell
Executive Director
Move Minnesota

Melvin Carter
Mayor
City of Saint Paul



The Arc
Minnesota
The Arc Minnesota

Fresh Energy
Fresh Energy

ISAIAH
Faith in Democracy
Isaiah

100%

100% Campaign



Sam Benson
Minnesota Interfaith Power
and Light

**our
streets**

MPLS
Ash Narayanan
Executive Director
Our Streets Minneapolis



Minnesota Center for
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Margaret Levin, State
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The Alliance



Health Professionals for a
Healthy Climate