



# Minnesotans Want a Transportation System that Works for Everyone

FEBRUARY 2023



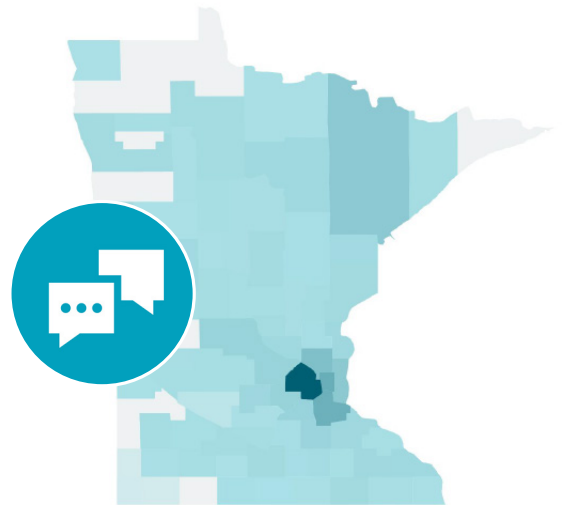
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# BACKGROUND: TRANSPORTATION IN MINNESOTA STATEWIDE POLL

Move Minnesota is a nonprofit leader in the movement for an equitable and sustainable transportation system that puts people first. Based in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Move Minnesota works to connect communities, end the climate crisis, expand access to jobs and resources, and improve daily life for Minnesotans of all ages, races, incomes, and abilities.

In the summer of 2022, Move Minnesota and partners contracted with Data for Progress to conduct a Minnesota statewide poll (“Transportation in Minnesota poll”) to understand transportation trends and attitudes. From August 3 to August 8, 2022, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 939 adults in Minnesota using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. Oversamples were collected of individuals with disabilities and individuals without cars. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is  $\pm 3$  percentage points.

This report summarizes key takeaways from the poll. In this report, references to “political affiliation” refer to Democrat, Independent/Third Party, and Republican. “Demographics” refers to gender (female, male), age (under 45, 45+), race/ethnicity (Black or African American, White, Latino/a), disability (do not identify as disabled, identify as disabled), and education (no college, college). “Geographic distribution” refers to urban, suburban, and rural. Car ownership status refers to those who own a car versus those who do not.



## Acknowledgments

Support for polling report drafting came from the McKnight Foundation and Lyft. Our Streets Minneapolis—and the Move Minnesota/Our Streets Minneapolis Vehicle Miles Traveled Advisory Council—collaborated on drafting the polling questions. Data for Progress contributed to poll-question development and conducted the poll. The primary author of this report was Sam Rockwell, with the support of Jennifer Harmening Thiede and Carolyn Szczepanski.

**our  
streets**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





**The places we go make up the fabric of our lives.** From the Twin Cities to the Red Lake Nation, from Worthington to Grand Marais, all of us want to have fast, affordable ways to get around our communities — and the ability to choose the transportation options that align with our values and work for our families.

**Yet our lawmakers have failed to invest in a transportation system that works for all Minnesotans and protects our climate.** Instead, they have funneled our tax dollars toward car-based infrastructure that widens inequities based on race, age, income, and ability; depletes our public coffers and personal budgets.

**A new poll shows a resounding majority of Minnesotans want a different approach.** They want to drive less and want to use transit more — and they overwhelmingly support shifting money from highway investments to other modes.

**This report examines the key findings of this statewide poll and recommends three actions** to align investments with climate needs and the strong public will across age, race, geography, and political orientation.

## Key Findings

-  While 86% of Transportation in Minnesota poll respondents report driving as one of the “main ways that [they] get around in [their] community,” nearly one in five drivers would prefer to travel by another mode.
-  66% of respondents would support a bill to “improve transportation options in Minnesota using funding from the state and federal government which would otherwise go to highway expansion,” illustrating public will to make different choices about how current funding is allocated.
-  A complementary statewide poll found that 55% of Minnesotans support a regional sales tax to fund metro-area transit, underscoring eagerness to also raise new money to support improvements, in addition to shifting existing dollars.
-  Nearly one-third of Minnesotans would be more likely to use buses and trains if there were greater access to transit where they lived, showing a clear path for Minnesota to make urgently needed progress toward climate goals.

## Recommendations

-  **CREATE LONG-TERM DEDICATED FUNDING** to support transit, biking, and walking in the Twin Cities metro with a 1% metro-area sales tax.
-  **EMBRACE FLEXIBILITY** in federal funding to better support transit, biking, and walking.
-  **SHIFT STATE FUNDING** from highway expansion to statewide transit investments by splitting the motor vehicle sales tax evenly between transit and highway projects.

# TOP FINDINGS: Minnesotans want more transportation options — and support moving money to make it happen

The Transportation in Minnesota poll reveals that nearly 1 in 5 Minnesotans would prefer to bike, walk or take transit rather than drive their car — and they want lawmakers to shift funding to make that possible.

## Changing Modes

Because of decades of transportation investment priorities at the federal and state level that have incentivized driving and underfunded other options, 86% of Transportation in Minnesota poll respondents report driving as one of the “main ways that [they] get around in [their] community.” However, when asked which form of transportation they would prefer if all forms “were available and worked well,” only 71% expressed a preference for driving.<sup>1</sup>

This reveals that **more than 17% of personal vehicle drivers would prefer to travel by another mode**. Extrapolating these poll results to Minnesota’s population shows that 658,000 Minnesotans drive as a primary way of getting around even though they *would prefer to travel by a different mode*.<sup>2</sup>

If just half of this group could make that mode switch and be relieved of the financial burden of car ownership, the total annual savings for the group would be \$1.6 billion.<sup>3</sup>

This preference holds across all genders, age groups, political affiliations, education statuses, races, and geographies polled: a double-digit percentage of car drivers in each of these subgroups expressed a preference for shifting to other forms of transportation and, except for non-car-owners, every subgroup expressed a preference for driving less.

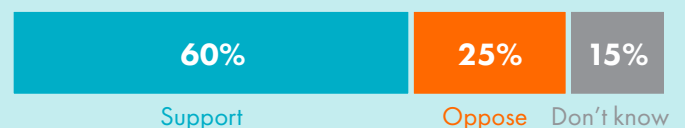


**NEARLY 1 IN 5 DRIVERS IN MN would prefer to bike, walk or take transit rather than drive their car**

## Minnesotans want to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)

Research reveals that VMT and road capacity are linked, with “a 1% increase in highway lane-miles lead[ing] to a 0.75-1% increase in VMT, on average.... New traffic often appears within 5 to 10 years after a road project, filling up any additional road capacity and increasing driving among nearby populations and highway projects intended to spur local economic growth also tend to just shift growth from one part of a region to another.”<sup>4</sup>

Minnesotans — and people across the nation<sup>5</sup> — are ready for a different approach. For instance, community engagement around the Minnesota Department of Transportation’s draft Statewide Multi-modal Transportation Plan found that “**60% [of Minnesotans] support some type of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction target.**”<sup>6</sup>



In addition, MnDOT’s 2019 Pathways report found that the most popular strategies for reducing carbon emissions in the transportation sector were (1) walkable and bikeable communities, (2) electric buses and trains, and (3) improved public transportation.<sup>7</sup>

## Shifting Funding

To make those transportation choices available and efficient, Minnesotans also support moving funding from freeways to other modes. The Transportation in Minnesota poll revealed that a decisive **66% majority of respondents would support a bill to “improve transportation options in Minnesota using funding from the state and federal government which would otherwise go to highway expansion.”** Only 27% of Minnesotans disapproved of the bill, showing a net-support of 39 percentage points.

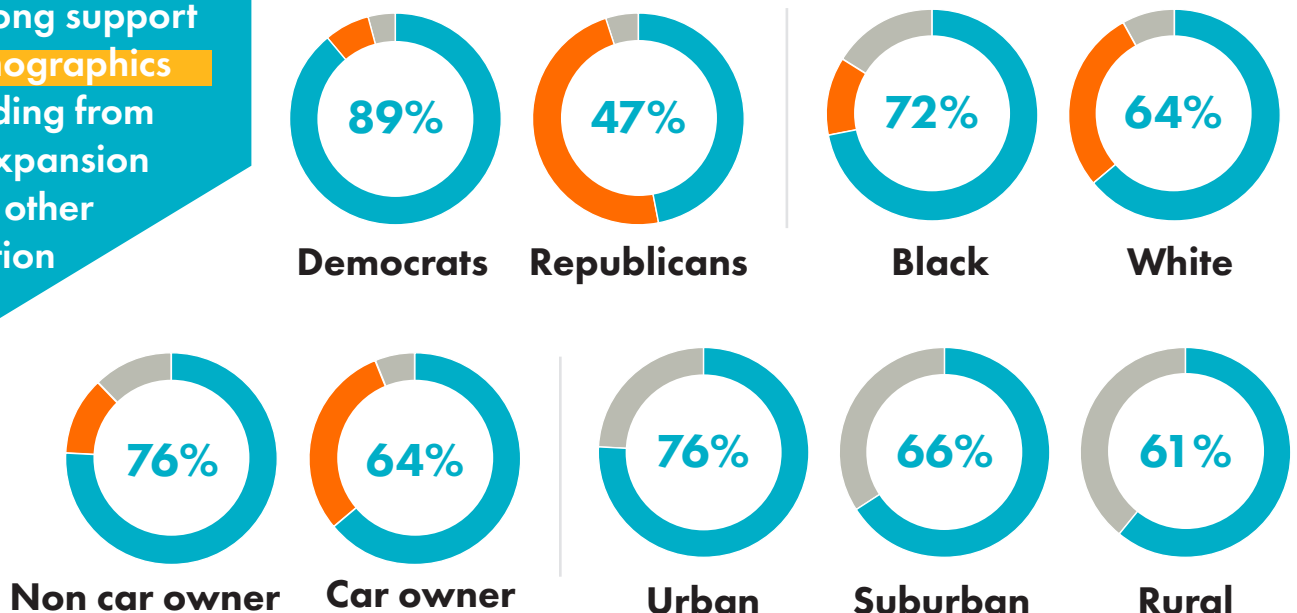
The polling question specified that “this bill expands opportunities for public transportation, reduces pollution from Minnesota roadways, and creates alternatives to using personal vehicles for transportation.”<sup>8</sup> The Transportation in Minnesota poll question notably articulated both what Minnesotans would gain from a transportation funding bill (expanded transportation options) and how those gains would be funded (“funding from the state and federal government that would otherwise go to highway expansion”). Even when explicitly considering this trade off, two-thirds of Minnesotans support increasing investments in transportation options.



Support was high across the political spectrum, with 89% of Democrats supporting the bill along with half of Republicans (47% supporting and 48% opposing). Every demographic subgroup polled supported the bill, with support strongest among female respondents, those under 45 years old, and Black or African Americans surveyed. (See graphic below.)

Additionally, a complementary statewide poll conducted in 2023 found that **55% of Minnesotans support a “one-cent sales tax within the metro area to fund metro-area regional transit,”** with only 40% opposing the funding mechanism.<sup>9</sup> This further underscores Minnesotans eagerness to fund a better transit system, regardless of whether that funding comes from shifting existing money from other investment or raising new money to support improvements.

There is strong support  
across demographics  
to shift funding from  
highway expansion  
to improve other  
transportation  
options



# Digging deeper: What factors motivate Minnesotans in their transportation choices?

The Transportation in Minnesota poll not only lifts up what Minnesotans want in their transportation system but illuminates why this shift is both critical and timely.

## EQUITY: Car reliance particularly disadvantages Black & Disabled populations

The Transportation in Minnesota poll showed that car ownership rates are not evenly distributed across all demographic groups. This not only reflects who is most impacted by cost increases related to driving, but also the demographic disparities that occur in a transportation system that invests more heavily in car-centric infrastructure over other options.

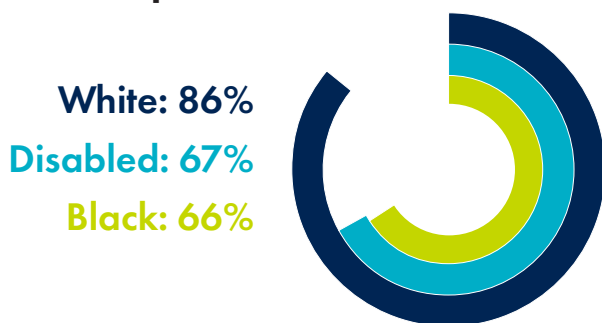
Overall, 85% of respondents replied “yes” to the question “do you own a personal vehicle for transportation?” However, while 86% of white respondents said yes, only 66% of Black or African American respondents and only 67% of those reporting a disability own a vehicle. These two demographic groups reported the lowest rates of car ownership of all groups polled.

Unsurprisingly, compared to 86% of all respondents, much lower rates of Black or African American (69%) and disabled (68%) respondents reported “driving a personal vehicle (car, truck, van, motorcycle, etc.)” as one of “the main ways that [they] get around in [their] community.”

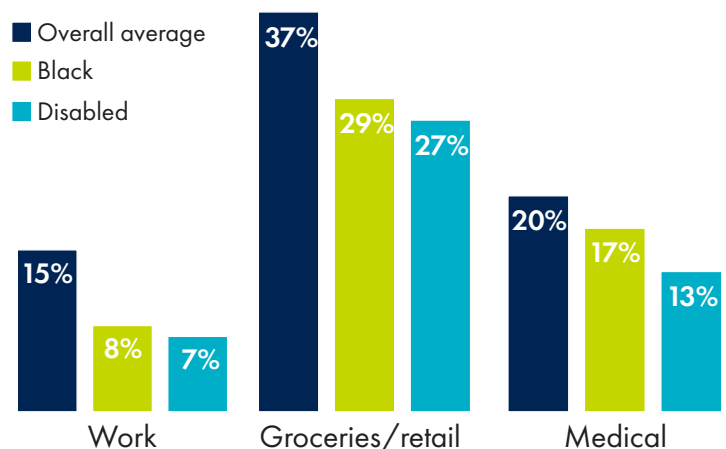
These low-car-ownership and lower-car-use demographic groups were least likely to state that the cost of transportation increased over the last year: just 65% of Black or African Americans and 73% of disabled respondents reported transportation cost increases, consistent with the likely link between car ownership and transportation cost increases in 2022 (see page 7).

Yet while Black or African Americans and disabled respondents reported lower-than-average transportation cost increases, these populations experience other more enduring transportation-related costs including longer travel times and lower access to destinations and opportunities. For instance, Black and Disabled respondents were significantly less likely to report that the average trip to essential daily activities like work, the grocery store and medical appointments, was “under 10 minutes.”

### Owns a personal vehicle for transportation



### Percent of trips that take less than 10 minutes



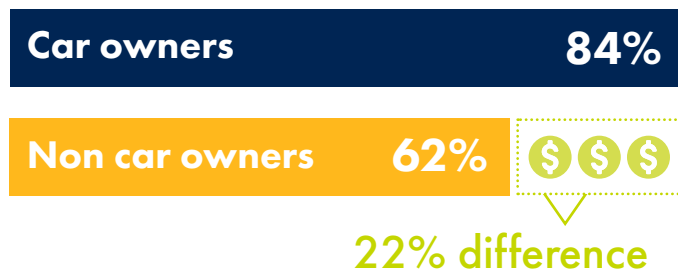
## ECONOMICS: Costs are up, especially for car owners

The Transportation in Minnesota poll revealed that 81% of Minnesotans “say that the cost of [their] transportation has increased... over the last year.” However, there are dramatic distinctions between those who own cars and those who don’t own cars. While 84% of car owners reported an increase in transportation costs and only 62% of non-car owners reported an increase — a 22% gap.

This likely reflects real increases in gas prices and vehicle purchase prices for car drivers and owners. Gas prices increased 23% from October 2021 to October 2022 and car purchase prices were up 12% year-over-year as of mid-summer 2022.<sup>10</sup> According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the annual costs associated with car ownership rose from \$9,666 to \$10,729 from 2021 to 2022, an 11% increase.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, the costs non-car-owners might incur are much lower costs, like an unlimited transit pass (\$1,440 in the Twin Cities metro, unchanged over the last year), a quality bicycle that will last for years with minimal maintenance (available under \$1,000), or a pair of good walking shoes (available for less than \$100). The Transportation in Minnesota poll reflected this as well, with 31% of respondents saying more transportation options “would make getting around cheaper.”

### Self-reported transportation costs have increased over the past year



## CLIMATE: Mitigating climate change is urgent

Currently, transportation is the most climate-polluting sector in the state, and, within the transportation sector, more than 70% of emissions come from passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks (including SUVs), and medium-to heavy-duty trucks.<sup>12</sup> What Minnesotans want is what experts and authorities say we need to reduce climate pollution.

As of 2018, the most recent data MnDOT provides in its reports, there are just over 60 billion vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the state of Minnesota each year.<sup>13</sup> Approximately 75% of this total — or 45 billion miles — is attributable to the kind of household travel covered in the Transportation in Minnesota poll (the other 25% is commercial travel).<sup>14</sup>

According to the preferences expressed in the Transportation in Minnesota poll, driving rates would drop 17% if Minnesota decision makers provided non-car transportation options that worked well. This would transform the Minnesota transportation sector’s climate emissions trajectory.



**More than 30% of Minnesotans said having more transportation options would make getting around cheaper.**



A 17% reduction in household VMT in Minnesota is equal to a 7.7-billion-mile reduction, eliminating 3.1 billion kilograms — or 3.4 million tons — of passenger vehicle CO<sub>2</sub> emissions each year.<sup>15</sup> This is equivalent to eliminating the annual emissions of 214,000 Americans — more than the emissions attributable to a population greater than Duluth and Rochester combined.<sup>16</sup>

Transportation in Minnesota poll results also indicate that, in addition to the 17% of drivers who would prefer to travel by another mode, about one-third of Minnesotans would take transit if they had greater access where they live.<sup>17</sup>

The Natural Resources Defense Council and the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) note that “the State of Minnesota must employ an ambitious and comprehensive strategy for reducing transportation emissions if it is to align itself with 1.5°C warming scenario called for by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)... RMI finds that the State of Minnesota must not only achieve 100 percent all-electric passenger vehicle and freight truck sales by 2035 and 2045, respectively, but it must also reduce VMT by 20% by 2050.” To make that happen, the IPCC recommends investing in public transit and VMT reduction, stating that “investment[s] in public transport are assessed as ‘no regret’ options.”<sup>18</sup>



**A 17% reduction in Minnesota's household VMT is equal to eliminating the annual emissions of the populations of Duluth and Rochester combined.**

## POLICY ALIGNMENT: Federal and state policies support it

Reducing VMT by shifting funding from highway expansions to transportation options like public transit — the investments two thirds of Minnesotans want — would also be consistent with priorities articulated by the United States Department of Transportation.

The USDOT is urging states to invest Bipartisan Infrastructure Law dollars to deliver a “transportation network [that] is accessible for all users, provides people with better choices across all modes, accommodates new and emerging technologies, is more sustainable and resilient to a changing climate, and is more equitable.” When selecting projects, the USDOT will explicitly prioritize “non-motorized... and transit options” over “projects that expand... highways.”<sup>19</sup>

This USDOT funding guidance is, in turn, generally consistent with a number of Minnesota policies and priorities. These include MnDOT's 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (“SMTP”), which includes a goal to reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled by 14% by 2040;<sup>20</sup> the Minnesota House Climate Action Plan, which includes policies to “build out bus-rapid transit and passenger rail systems in both the metro area and greater Minnesota to connect more people with mass transit option, [and] change transportation and land use planning to reduce the need to drive;”<sup>21</sup> and the Governor's Climate Action Framework, which includes policies to “increase funding for non-motorized transportation,... increase transit services,... [and] decrease vehicle miles traveled” in line with SMTP targets.<sup>22</sup> Similar goals exist in a number of Minnesota communities.<sup>23</sup>



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Minnesotans want better transit, biking, and walking; want to drive less; and are eager to support policies and funding to deliver on these desires. To create the transportation future Minnesotans want and deserve, we recommend the following actions:

## Invest in Transportation Options Including Transit and Non-Motorized Modes

With 17% of Minnesotans expressing a desire to drive less and 30% of Minnesotans expressing interest in using public transportation more if there were greater access, we recommend significant financial investment in transit across the state. In recent years, both the governor and Minnesota House of Representatives have proposed a sales tax in the Twin Cities metro to fund transit, biking, and walking.<sup>24</sup> **We recommend:**

### 1% sales tax in the Twin Cities metro

to support a significant expansion of high-quality transit, biking, and walking connections; improve service levels on existing and future lines; and would fund the operations and maintenance of the full and improved system in perpetuity.

## Shifting both federal and state money

from climate-harming highway expansion projects into investments that improve transportation options for all Minnesotans.

### Embrace Federal Funding Flexibility

The Minnesota Department of Transportation should embrace flexibility in federal formula grant funding to shift investments from highway expansion projects to transit, biking, and walking. Currently, Minnesota only flexes about 4% of its federal highway funding to support non-highway projects.<sup>25</sup> Yet the majority of federal formula program funds can be used to support transit projects.<sup>26</sup> MnDOT should embrace this flexibility and shift federal funds to support transit investments across Minnesota.

### Shift State Money from Highway Expansion to Transit

Currently, Minnesota funds an average of about \$200M per year in highway expansion projects in Twin Cities metro alone.<sup>27</sup> Although several sources of state-generated transportation funding are restricted to highway corridor investment, a minimum of 40% of Motor Vehicle Sales Tax ("MVST") receipts must support transit investments (there is no maximum investment in transit).<sup>28</sup> We recommend increasing transit's MVST share to 50% — a funding increase of approximately \$100M per year — and allocating a majority of that increase in transit funding to transit systems outside of the Twin Cities metro. These shifts from highway expansion funding to funding for transit, biking, and walking are consistent with what Minnesotans want, consistent with federal guidance, and have precedent in peer regions.<sup>29</sup>

# Sources

1. The forms of transportation listed in the question were “driving a personal vehicle,” “taking public transportation,” “taking a rideshare,” “bicycling or scootering,” and “walking or using a wheelchair or other mobility device to get around.”
2. The adult (18+) population in Minnesota was estimated at 4,388,983 in July, 2021 ([www.census.gov/quickfacts/MN](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/MN)). 86% of this population is 3,774,525. 71% of the adult population is 3,116,177. The difference between these two numbers is 658,348.
3. The 2020 annual cost of owning a car was \$9,561 (AAA 2020). The 2020 average annual transportation costs for non-car owners was \$4,662 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).  $(658,000 / 2) \times (9,561 - 4662) = \$1.6B$ .
4. Drivers of VMT and Priority Reduction Strategies, State Smart Transportation Initiative and Smart Growth America, MnDOT-commissioned study (2022) pages 10, 22.
5. Voters Want A Better Transit System for America, Data for Progress et al. (2020), page 3: [t4america.org/maps-tools/the-green-new-deal-for-transportation](http://t4america.org/maps-tools/the-green-new-deal-for-transportation).
6. Promoting Transportation Options and Measuring with a VMT Target, MnDOT Presentation (2022), slide 6.
7. Pathways to Decarbonizing Transportation in Minnesota, MnDOT (2019), page 35.
8. The full question reads: “Lawmakers in Minnesota have proposed a bill that aims to improve transportation options in Minnesota using funding from the state and federal government that would otherwise go to highway expansion.
9. Statewide poll conducted by Data for Progress for Evergreen Action, Jan 28-Feb 1, 2023
10. According to AAA, gas prices in Minnesota rose from \$3.08 per gallon of regular gasoline on Oct 9, 2021, to \$3.79 per gallon on Oct 9, 2022, a 23% increase: [gasprices.aaa.com/top-trends](http://gasprices.aaa.com/top-trends). JP Morgan Chase reported an 11.8% increase in car prices year over year: [www.jpmorgan.com/insights/research/when-will-car-prices-drop](http://www.jpmorgan.com/insights/research/when-will-car-prices-drop)
11. Average Cost of Owning and Operating an Automobile: [www.bts.gov/content/average-cost-owning-and-operating-automobilea-assuming-15000-vehicle-miles-year](http://www.bts.gov/content/average-cost-owning-and-operating-automobilea-assuming-15000-vehicle-miles-year)
12. Climate Change Trends and Data: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/air-water-land-climate/climate-change-trends-and-data>
13. Promoting Transportation Options and Measuring with a VMT Target, Slide 5, MnDOT (2022): [www.dot.state.mn.us/d8/atp/pdfs/April2022/Statewide%20VMT%20Reduction%20Goal%20Presentation.pdf](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d8/atp/pdfs/April2022/Statewide%20VMT%20Reduction%20Goal%20Presentation.pdf)
14. See Drivers of VMT and priority reduction strategies: Minnesota, Smart Growth America and SSTI, Updated Feb 2022, page 21.
15. See Greenhouse Gas Emissions from a Typical Passenger Vehicle, EPA: [www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle#driving](http://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle#driving); calculation using 7.65 billion miles. 3.1 billion kg = 3.4 million tons.
16. The average American emits 16 tons of CO2 per year. [www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/carbon-footprint-calculator/](http://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/carbon-footprint-calculator/)
17. 30% of respondents replied “more likely” to the question: “If there were greater access to high-quality public transportation (like buses and trains) in the community where you live, would you be more likely, less likely or equally likely to use public transportation to get around?”
18. SMTP comment letter from the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Rocky Mountain Institute to MnDOT (Sept 16, 2022).
19. Memo by U.S. DOT Deputy Administrator Stephanie Pollack, Dec 16, 2021: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/bipartisan-infrastructure-law/building\\_a\\_better\\_america-policy\\_framework.cfm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bipartisan-infrastructure-law/building_a_better_america-policy_framework.cfm)
20. Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, Chapter 5 (2022): [minnesotago.org/final-plans/smtp-final-plan-2022/chapter-5](http://minnesotago.org/final-plans/smtp-final-plan-2022/chapter-5)
21. Minnesota House Climate Action Plan (2020): [www.house.leg.state.mn.us/dflpdf/990649f7-d9db-4ffd-a5b5-496baddbb282.pdf](http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/dflpdf/990649f7-d9db-4ffd-a5b5-496baddbb282.pdf)
22. Minnesota’s Climate Action Framework (2022): [climate.state.mn.us/sites/climate-action/files/Climate%20Action%20Framework.pdf](http://climate.state.mn.us/sites/climate-action/files/Climate%20Action%20Framework.pdf)
23. See e.g. Promoting Transportation Options and Measuring with a VMT Target (2022), slide 4: [www.dot.state.mn.us/d8/atp/pdfs/April2022/Statewide%20VMT%20Reduction%20Goal%20Presentation.pdf](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d8/atp/pdfs/April2022/Statewide%20VMT%20Reduction%20Goal%20Presentation.pdf)
24. See e.g. HF 1684 (2021)
25. Want to Use Highway Dollars for Transit? These Places Already Do: [transitcenter.org/want-to-use-highway-dollars-for-transit-these-places-already-do](http://transitcenter.org/want-to-use-highway-dollars-for-transit-these-places-already-do)
26. How States and Regions Can Unlock Hundreds of Billions of Dollars for Transit: [transitcenter.org/how-states-and-regions-can-unlock-hundreds-of-billions-of-dollars-for-transit](http://transitcenter.org/how-states-and-regions-can-unlock-hundreds-of-billions-of-dollars-for-transit)
27. Table of projects developed by MnDOT staff and shared with the MnDOT Sustainable Transportation Advisory Council VMT Reduction and Transportation Options workgroup.
28. Minnesota State Constitution, Article 14.
29. The Denver metropolitan area has begun to cancel highway expansion projects and shift funding to transit investments. See e.g. [cleantechnica.com/2022/09/28/victory-co-cancels-highway-expansion-funds-transit-instead](http://cleantechnica.com/2022/09/28/victory-co-cancels-highway-expansion-funds-transit-instead)



Move Minnesota is a leader in the movement for an equitable and sustainable transportation system that puts people first. We are passionate about connecting communities, ending the climate crisis, expanding access to jobs and resources, and improving daily life for Minnesotans of all ages, races, incomes, and abilities.