

Transportation Policy Plan

Report of Public Comments

December 8, 2008 – January 12, 2009

Comment Overview

The draft Transportation Policy Plan was adopted September 10, 2008 for purposes of public comment. The comment period ran from September 10, 2008 to November 6, 2008. The Report of Public Hearing summarizing the comments received and proposed responses to the comments was completed in December, discussed with the Transportation Committee on Dec 8 and posted on the Council's website.

After the draft plan was adopted in September 2008 significant changes in the national economy led to calls for Congress to adopt an economic stimulus package which would likely include funding for transportation infrastructure. During the comment period, an issue was raised about how this region could respond to the potential availability of additional federal funding for highway projects since the proposed fiscally constrained draft plan no longer contained the highway expansion projects that were in the previous transportation plan the Council adopted in 2004.

In response to this issue, staff proposed that these projects be added back into the plan with an explanation that although they were outside the fiscal constraint for the funding expected by 2030 through normal sources, they were being added to allow selection of one of the projects if additional federal highway money becomes available through the potential economic stimulus package. Adding these projects also required additional air quality conformity analysis and a public comment period on this analysis. The following notice was published in the State Register on Dec 8 and posted on the Council website:

“Public notice of the January 12 meeting is being made since the Council will consider adding language to the final plan which will allow the region maximum flexibility to take advantage of this potential funding. The Council will list 11 major highway expansion projects beyond the fiscally constrained regional plan that could use these additional funds if they become available. The Council has worked with its partners to address the air quality conformity procedures so any one of these major projects from the 2005 Transportation Policy Plan could take advantage of these additional federal funds. [The air quality analysis](#) of this change and the [MPCA review letter](#) can be found at www.metrocouncil.org.

Given this change from the Council's September 2008 draft of the Transportation Plan, this opportunity for public input is being provided. Any person that has comments on this change may appear before the Metropolitan Council Transportation Committee or submit comments in the following manner on or before 4:00 pm, January 12, 2009”

24 comments were received before 4 pm January 12, all via email. The following spreadsheet summarizes the comments received, who made the comment and the staff response to the comment. There is also an index of all comment contributors with an identifying number attached. Many people made similar comments so a generalized summary of comments is followed by the identifying number of the persons or groups

who made the comment. A written record of the comments is available from the Council's Data Center.

In addition, three people testified at the committee meeting although two of them represented organizations, Fresh Energy (Lynne Bly) and the Sierra Club (Ethan Fawley) who had already submitted written material. They did not introduce additional comments but spoke from their written material. One citizen, Tom Clarke, did not submit written material but spoke in opposition to the addition of more highway projects to the plan.

The minutes of the January 12 Transportation Committee will be posted on the Council's website after January 26.

ID	Organization	Name
1	St. Paul Smart Trips	Jessica Treat, Executive Director
2	Citizen	Tucker, MacNeil
3	Citizen	Les Everett
4	Citizen	Shad Holland
5	Citizen	Jordan Groh
6	Citizen	Faith Ralston
7	Citizen	Gabrielle Pillman
8	University UNITED	Linda Winsor, Assistant Director
9	Citizen	Sarah Humpage
10	Citizen	Ann Kirn
11	Citizen	Ryan Otten
12	Citizen	Noel Bell
13	Citizen	Alice Tibbetts
14	Citizen	Amber Kay
15	Citizen	Nick Mason
16	Citizen	Stephen Mitrione
17	Citizen	Amie Lewandowski
18	Citizen	Jessie Schreier
19	Citizen	Mark Thieroff
20	Twin West Chamber of Commerce	Bryan Lake, Director of Government Affairs
21	Fresh Energy	Lynne Bly, Transportation Policy Director
22	Sierra Club	Ethan Fawley & Jeff Hazen
23	Transit for Livable Communities	Lea Schuster, Executive Director
24	Minnesota Department of Transportation	Scott McBride, Metro District Engineer
25	Citizen	Tom Clarke

Comment	Commentors	Response
Do not expand highways or add more roads, we need more ways to get around beyond the car, use the majority of any stimulus money for transit, bike and pedestrian facilities	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25	Response: The plan still emphasizes the need for a multi modal approach to transportation needs in the region. However, until Congress passes a stimulus package it is unknown what types of funds will be available or what will be the rules for project eligibility or selection. It is possible, and in fact likely, that Congress will distribute the money through existing funding programs, so it is possible money would be allocated to FHWA that can only be spent on highway projects, to FTA that can only be spent on transit projects or to FAA that can only be spent on airport projects.
Of the 11 major highway expansion projects we favor highway 610 and highway 100	20	Until Congress passes a stimulus package it is unknown what types of funds will be available or what will be the rules for project eligibility or selection, so actual project selection will occur at a later date.
There is no insight on how a project would be selected, what process for public review and input will be used, or what funding is sufficient is for project selection	21	Until Congress passes a stimulus package it is unknown what types of funds will be available or what will be the rules for project eligibility or selection so actual projects for construction cannot be selected until these parameters are known. The Council's Transportation Advisory Board has begun discussing a process for project selection but it cannot be finalized until a stimulus package is adopted with timelines and project requirements as well as the amount of funding that is available. The Council has an adopted public participation process for transportation planning.
The scope, impacts and costs of these projects should be reassessed	21, 22, 23	The final plan still recommends reassessing all of these projects to see if their mobility objectives could be met at a lower cost.

<p>We believe that the current Plan (without amendment) identifies sufficient projects from all modes that would allow the Twin Cities metropolitan region to take full advantage of federal economic stimulus funding. If you are going to add highway projects you should add other multimodal projects, like 3 car trains on Hiawatha, as well.</p>	<p>23,</p>	<p>Highway funding is formula based, making it easier to forecast than transit capital funding which is mainly discretionary, so the fiscal constraint applied to highway projects in this plan is tighter than that applied to transit projects. If economic stimulus funding becomes available for transit projects there are several already in the plan that could be put forward since they are not fully funded. However, without adding a list of potential highway projects, there would be no unfunded highway projects in the plan that could be selected.</p>
<p>We protest the lack of transparency in the process being used to solicit additional projects.</p>	<p>23,</p>	<p>The Council has not undertaken a process "to solicit additional projects." At this time the Council is only completing the technical and administrative process to add one of these 12 major highway projects back into the plan, so if funding should become available, one of these projects could be built without amending the plan.</p>
<p>There should be 12 projects on the list of highway expansion projects, not 11, since the Cayuga bridge project will only complete a portion of the previously proposed expansion of I-35E between I-94 and TH 36.</p>	<p>24</p>	<p>The Council staff agrees that this misunderstanding led to I-35E being left off the original list. Air quality conformity analysis has been completed for I-35E and this project should also be included in the list of the 12 major highway projects being added to the plan, so if funding should become available, one of these projects could be built.</p>