



Association of Minnesota Counties

May 17, 2017

To the Members of the Minnesota Legislature:

As county officials, one of our fundamental duties is to oversee the maintenance and repair of our local transportation infrastructure and services. Across the state, the transportation needs of our respective communities are actually quite similar – whether in Greater Minnesota or in the metro. We all share the responsibility of providing for adequate roads, bridges, and transit systems.

Given your role as the voices of your community at the Legislature, you are charged with the constitutional responsibility under Article 14 of the Minnesota Constitution of passing a solution for the state to construct, improve, and maintain public highways as well as empowering local units of government – such as counties – to carry out this essential function.

Yet, over the past several years, differences at the Legislature over funding transportation needs have been the obstacle to providing a comprehensive solution for basic funding for our state’s roads, bridges, and transit ways. **The Association of Minnesota Counties believes that the time for compromise is now because the risks to the public and the cost to taxpayers will only grow if our transportation needs remain unaddressed.**

Reversing a long-standing position of opposing general fund dollars to fund transportation priorities, our association announced earlier this session that we now support re-directing revenue from the general fund collected from sales taxes on automobile-related transactions to fund transportation priorities, as part of a compromise solution. **A compromise package should also include increased revenue from a constitutionally dedicated source, such as vehicle registration fees.** Counties rely on these dollars to fund road and bridge projects.

While the Legislature and the governor appear to be moving toward compromise on using general fund dollars for a transportation plan, the Association of Minnesota Counties urges both sides to also find a solution that increases funding from a constitutionally-dedicated source of revenue. This would enable counties to rely on a consistent revenue stream of additional resources insulated from the uncertainty that can surround a new Legislature’s adjusted priorities.

Additionally, any solution that doesn’t adequately address transit needs does a disservice to the thousands of Minnesotans who utilize transit services every day. Many Minnesotans use transit as their mode of transportation to work. Others, particularly senior citizens or those with disabilities, rely on transit to get them to the grocery store or to the doctor’s office. Regardless of the reason for using transit services, it’s critical for the Legislature and governor to come together to give counties the resources to fund transit operations in a manner that makes sense for the unique needs of the county.

While much discussion has focused on an alleged divide between the needs of Greater Minnesota or the metro, the reality is that we simply cannot address our transportation needs piece-by-piece or region-by-region any longer. **Because we acknowledge that all our communities have particular needs relating to roads, bridges, and transit, the only realistic opportunity to fulfill all of our transportation obligations is to compromise.** As an association, we have provided the framework for compromise as leaders at the Capitol engage in negotiations.

The time for compromise is now because counties and local property taxpayers can no longer bear the burden of inaction from state government. By uniting across regional lines – metro and Greater Minnesota – to rebuild our transportation infrastructure, no community will be left behind.

Sincerely,

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