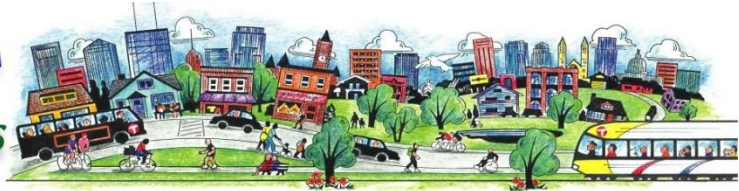


TRANSIT for Livable Communities



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October 21, 2011

Minnesota Department of Transportation
Office of Statewide Multimodal Planning
395 John Ireland Blvd. MS 440
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155
Attn: Mr. Philip Schaffner

Re: Comments on Minnesota GO vision document

Dear Mr. Schaffner:

Transit for Livable Communities applauds the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) for completing this long-range (50-year) vision and using a broad range of techniques for soliciting input from the public and outside experts. It is very encouraging to see the bold, transformative vision of Minnesota Go. Our comments include 1) where we support the vision as outlined and 2) suggested additions and questions.

Where we concur with Minnesota GO

Several major forces will impact transportation in Minnesota in the decades ahead. MnDOT wisely notes that these include: changing demographics, rising energy prices, climate change, rising health care costs associated with obesity, and budget challenges. Minnesota Go also appropriately recognizes that responding to these challenges and opportunities is a shared responsibility across jurisdictions (and among transportation experts and the general public).

Understanding “*what we are trying to achieve*” through transportation is much more nuanced than getting from point A to point B. Rather, Minnesota Go notes that the transportation system can and should improve economic competitiveness, quality of life and environmental health. Minnesota Go also notes that “*place*”, including the extent of transportation options and transportation’s contribution to overall quality of life, can play an important role in attracting “*human capital and financial capital to the state.*” It would also follow from this that a community should be enhanced not degraded by proximity to transportation corridors (for example degradation from vehicle emissions or noise).

Minnesota Go correctly identifies the importance of transportation access regardless of age or economic means and that reliability and multiple transportation options are more important than the speed of vehicle traffic.

Transportation's impacts on public health are woven into Minnesota Go. The growing demand for active transportation (i.e. non-motorized) and public transit are seen as assets toward maximizing the health of people and the environment.

Minnesota Go also includes a forward thinking notion for any public agency or service provider, that less is more, in some cases. Minnesota Go guides the state to "*not overbuild*", "*that some parts of the current system may no longer be needed in the future*", and that innovation can present "*an alternative to expanding the physical layout of the system.*" TLC strongly agrees with this new direction.

Suggested Additions and Questions

While we broadly agree with the guiding principles, and challenges and opportunities in Minnesota Go, we also have these recommended additions and questions.

- **Changing land use patterns (both with and without policy intervention) should be included in Minnesota Go.** Most experts agree that housing demand over the next several decades will be increasingly for more compact designs (i.e. attached rather than detached) that allow access to key destinations by a combination of transit, bicycling and walking. A 50-year vision should not be silent on the importance of better integrating transportation investments and land use.
- **The vision should include or suggest performance measures relative to the guiding principle to "*emphasize reliable and predictable options*" that "*prioritize multiple options over reliance on a single option*" and moving toward "*energy independence*" in the transportation sector.** MnDOT, over the past several decades, has relied far too heavily on levels of traffic congestion and vehicle speed as the leading performance measures, and has used these as the rationale for committing huge sums to expand the state's highways and bridges. We are concerned that Minnesota Go does not directly address this institutional impediment to change. At a minimum, the vision should reference Minnesota's statutory goals for the transportation system (Minnesota Statutes Section 174.01, Subdivision 2).
- **The likely safety and efficiency benefits of vehicle automation need to consider the costs and affordability of these improvements.** Making it safer or easier to drive using vehicle automation may have "*enormous efficiency and safety benefits*" but it will also, in many cases, be at cross purposes with many of the other guiding principles in Minnesota Go. The more expensive motor vehicles become, the fewer people can afford to own one.

The shared responsibility approach to planning requires new models for citizen education and engagement. Transportation planning is too frequently cast as an engineering problem rather than a community building opportunity. To succeed in “*adapting to changes in society, technology, the environment and the economy,*” MnDOT will need to increase its capacity for communicating both the detailed technical aspects, and the multiple purposes, of each transportation project, at an earlier point in the process. Additionally, meaningful community input should be solicited in the formative stages of the project rather than at the final stages.

- **Will the money follow the vision?** The impact of Minnesota’s transportation system on health, the environment and the economy will largely be determined by what actually gets built. Minnesota Go strongly articulates a multi-modal, equitable future that sufficiently maintains the state’s transportation assets. It is incumbent upon the state legislature, MnDOT, and its partners to establish funding priorities (in future transportation planning documents) consistent with this new vision. This might require a fundamental reconsideration of barriers (including language in the Minnesota Constitution) that currently dictate how transportation projects are selected and how funds are spent.

Sincerely,



Barbara J. Thoman
Executive Director

Cc: Dave VanHattum, TLC staff