



*Testimony before the Minnesota House Transportation Committee, January 24, 2011,
by Dave Van Hattum, Policy and Advocacy Program Manager, Transit for Livable Communities*

Mr. Chair and Committee members,

My Name is Dave Van Hattum. I'm with Transit for Livable Communities, a non-partisan, non-profit organization.

We applaud the Legislative Auditors report and find it to be an excellent resource on transit in the Twin Cities. Before addressing the governance issues, it is useful to take note of why we invest in public transit and our region's performance.

We invest in transit to save families and businesses money and to get people to work and other key destinations.

AASHTO (The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) reports that every dollar invested in transit results in over \$6 dollars of economic return. These returns include reduced congestion delays, reduced costs to consumers to operate cars, reduced emissions, and increased safety. Transit also gets people to jobs – nearly 2/3 of metro area transit riders are going to work.

In reviewing the Legislative Auditors report, I would encourage you to start on page 95. – the section on transit performance. The unmistakable conclusion is that the Twin Cities region has a highly effective transit system. On measures of efficiency, effectiveness, safety and fuel economy we are consistently ranked in the top third of our peers. Further, both Metro Transit and the suburban providers have won national awards for excellence and our regional planning and building of transitways was the foundation for receiving a major, competitive HUD Sustainable Communities grant.

Some tension, distrust and complexity in governance structure, but excellent results, are far better than the opposite: Simple, unremarkable, governance, but poor results.

We agree with the report's conclusion that, after substantial recent increases in transit ridership, there remains a very high level of pent-up demand for transit in the Twin Cities. We also agree with the recommendation to streamline governance at the Met Council by including elected officials on the Council and eliminating the Transportation Advisory Board.

We also have a couple of critiques of the Legislative Auditors report

First, the idea that there are not clear priorities for transit is vastly overstated. The priority for transit (as the legislature has articulated for years) is high ridership per dollar invested (in this regard we are 3rd among 12 peers). And regional transitways are prioritized through a very rigorous federal process. No doubt there are tensions between providing transit for those without cars versus attracting new riders (i.e. getting people without cars to jobs, education, etc, vs. getting people out of cars and into transit, thereby reducing congestion delays) but this is no different than similar tradeoffs regarding road investments or any public investment. If you don't believe me, I encourage you to ask Mn/DOT or attend a Transportation Advisory Board meeting.

Second, it is problematic that the impact of local land use decisions on transit effectiveness is not included in the Auditor's report. We believe that land use (compact centers and walkable neighborhoods) provides a far greater impact on performance than any variation in governance structures. In fact, all of the 5 peer regions with higher ridership per capita than the Twin Cities (identified in the Auditors report) are also more densely populated than the Twin Cities.

Planning for more density is about preparing for the new economy and changing market preferences. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that Gen Y-ers, the largest demographic of homebuyers, "don't want dependence on a car" and do "desire walkable neighborhoods with transit service." Yet, local zoning often limits

the provision of more compact, mixed-use housing development. And far too much of our region does not currently have convenient transit options.

To conclude, public transit is a smart investment for Minnesota and the Twin Cities region is very effective in providing transit service.

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