



May 5, 2023

To: Members of the Conference Committee on the Omnibus Transportation Bill

Re: Please support critical investments to benefit Minnesota's environment and people

Dear Legislators,

Thank you for serving on this important committee and for your work on this Transportation Finance and Policy Bill, HF 2887. We greatly appreciate the many good provisions and targeted investments made in both versions of this bill to support our transportation infrastructure. The budget plan passed by this Committee and the Legislature will help reduce carbon emissions from transportation – the largest single source of climate pollution in our state – and reduce its health impacts on our people and environment. We are pleased that the bill provides both capital investments and ongoing support for clean transportation options that give Minnesotans more freedom to get around in their everyday lives.

On behalf of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership and the organizations listed at the end of this letter, we would like to highlight some key provisions in this bill that our statewide coalition members believe are especially important in moving Minnesota forward toward a cleaner, more robust, equitable and more effective transportation system.

Ongoing funding for transit (Part C, p. R15)

While we appreciate this bill's provision of funds for **transit system operations**, (Part A, p. R21) especially important is the provision for a **sales tax in the Twin Cities Metro Area to fund the ongoing operation of public transit in the seven-county region**. While one-time surplus funds and bonding can help build a robust transit system, they cannot support the long-term operation of our public transit systems. To effectively compete with other metropolitan regions and reduce our carbon emissions, we must provide Minnesotans with convenient and reliable transit service, and that starts with stable funding for operations.

We appreciate that implementing any new tax, especially a sales tax, can be a contentious issue. But stable funding for public transit service that knits the Metro region together will generate enormous economic dividends for our state and help numerous Minnesotans get to where they need to go, regardless of whether they own a car. As stated in the Climate Action Framework it is imperative to “increase transit services, create more reliable and convenient transit networks, prioritize services in communities where transit is essential and residents are disproportionately affected by air pollution.”

While the Metro area will pay for and benefit most directly from these services, the entire state will be lifted by the economic and environmental gains. We believe that the rate of the metro-area sales tax should be $\frac{3}{4}$ of a percent, as included in the House version of this bill. The Metro area needs a stable and robust source of funding for transit operations, and the $\frac{3}{4}$ percent tax will be far more effective. **We ask that at least $\frac{5}{8}$ of the receipts from this tax be dedicated to Metro-area transit, as is currently the case in both bills.**

Investments in intercity transit and electrification

- **Passenger Rail** – Funding for intercity passenger rail will help grow our state’s economy and put new destinations in reach for Minnesotans through projects including the Minneapolis-Duluth Northern Lights Express project and expanded Amtrak train service between the Twin Cities and Chicago. We ask that you fund this provision using the House-proposed amount of \$201,347,000. (Part A, p. R6)
- **Electric Vehicle Infrastructure** – This bill includes investments, matched by federal aid, in Minnesota’s Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program, which helps Minnesotans benefit from the rapid rise of zero-emission electric vehicles by making it easier to charge those vehicles across the state. We ask that you fund this provision using the House amount of \$14,122,000. (Part A, p. R18)

Active transportation

- **Active Transportation Program** funding will help Minnesota communities invest in infrastructure – such as sidewalks and trails – that make it easier for residents to bike, walk, and roll to their destinations – the cleanest and healthiest form of transportation. We ask that you fund this provision using the Senate-proposed amount of \$50,000. (Part A, p. R43)
- The **Safe Routes to School** program will receive funding in this bill to help communities construct targeted improvements – such as crosswalks and sidewalks – that make it safer for Minnesota kids to walk and bike to school. We ask that you fund this provision using **the Senate-proposed amount of \$25,797,000. (Part A, p. R5)**

Climate and Environment

- **Clean Transportation Standard Working Group** – This provision in the Senate version of HF 2887 would create a task force to study and make recommendations ahead of the 2024 session on a clean transportation standard to help solve Minnesota’s largest climate challenge: getting net greenhouse gas emissions from transportation fuel to net zero by 2050. We ask that the conference committee include it in the final version with updates to the working group membership. (Transportation Part D, p. R80)
- **Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emissions Assessment** – This provision would require the Department of Transportation to assess the climate impact of highway expansion projects and mitigate their impact. Addressing these emissions that are also harmful to public health must be part of our state’s climate action strategy. (Transportation Part D, p. R19)
- **Climate Action Policy Plan** – This provision would require the Metropolitan Council to include climate action in its long-range comprehensive planning, helping to effectively target the Metro area’s greenhouse gas emissions. (Part D, p. R67-R68)
- We are pleased to see the **Highways for Habitat Program** included in House and Senate versions of this omnibus bill with a \$1,000,000 appropriation. This program would provide and protect critical roadside shelter for Minnesota’s most vital and vulnerable pollinator and wildlife species. (Part A, p. R8)

We thank you for your leadership on these important issues. We are encouraged by the historic opportunity this bill creates to build a cleaner, safer, and more equitable future for transportation in our state.

Sincerely,



Steve Morse
Executive Director

Submitted on behalf of the following organizations:

Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota

League of Women Voters Minnesota

League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region*

Minnesota Ornithologists Union

Minnesota Well Owners Organization

Move Minnesota

Pollinator Friendly Alliance

Renewing the Countryside

Resilient Cities and Communities

St. Paul Audubon Society

Vote Climate

**denotes non-MEP member*