



FORWARD MOVEMENT ON TRANSPORTATION

Here's why I voted for the transportation package

Dear Friends,
By now, you probably know that Democrats and Republicans in the Minnesota Legislature joined together to pass a major transportation package (over the Governor's veto). As a result, we've made the first major investment in our roads and bridges in twenty years. The new funding package raises the gas tax permanently by two cents per gallon at first, rising over time to five cents. The package also provides the first-ever reliable funding source for light rail, commuter rail, and bus service. The vote was tough, but necessary.

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1. We desperately need new investment.

Everyone admits the huge need for better roads, bridges, bus routes, and rail lines. By almost every measure, we're choking on traffic. In 1990, the typical metro area commuter spent about ten hours per year stuck in traffic, as compared to forty hours now. The problem would get worse with no new investment, especially with a million more residents coming our way in the next several years. The state last raised the gas tax in 1988.

2. We got a true compromise.

The package isn't perfect. But it's a classic compromise. The original proposal called for a ten-cent permanent gas tax increase that would rise automatically each year at the rate of inflation. Now, there's a five-cent tax, with no automatic raise. As a result, even longtime anti-tax groups like the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce supported the proposal. That's because the current crush of traffic hurts our business climate.

3. We'll see lower overall taxes.

Each of us who drives in the metro area already pays a "congestion tax" of hundreds of dollars per year in lost time, gas, and productivity when we're stuck in traffic. By investing in our roads, we'll reduce that hidden tax. We'll also help keep a lid on rising property taxes, which are now used by our local governments to pay for road and bridge projects the state can't afford.

4. We'll finally have steady funding for rail and bus lines.

We can't just pave our way out of our traffic problems. Record setting Light Rail and bus ridership shows that there's a public appetite for transit. We'll now have a small pot of money dedicated to funding those solutions.

5. We'll get a more balanced highway funding system.

Currently, the metro area receives significantly less funding compared to the amount of gas tax it pays out - and the rural part of the state receives significantly more money compared to what it pays into the system. The new transportation package helps correct this imbalance so that we in St. Louis Park and Hopkins will see more of our gas tax money go to local road and bridge projects.

As always, please feel free to contact me about any issue, idea, or concern.