

My name is Mathews Hollinshead. I am one of two Transit Modal Representatives on the Transportation Advisory Board, the TAB, of the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities. I am not representing that board today, These are my personal remarks.

I support House File 3718 because it is, in essence, an Equal Rights Amendment for nondrivers and pedestrians, by enabling anyone in the Transit Taxing District (TTD) to reach any location in the TTD in a reasonable amount of time without a car.

Our current “normal” is warped. In a book called “The Big Roads,” by Earl Swift, he notes that the father of the Appalachian Trail — the longest pedestrian right-of-way in North America — was also the father of the limited access roadway — a paradigm that has made life on foot near impossible. Also in the book Swift notes that the first person ever granted a PhD in traffic engineering — from Harvard, no less — was also the father of jaywalking, which from the 1920s threw pedestrians off our streets and roads, forcing them to corners in order to cross a street.

There is hardly a single building, of any type, in America today, that is not directly accessible by motor vehicle in a reasonable amount of time. But on foot, the vast majority of our built environment is not accessible in a reasonable amount of time.

Parity between pedestrian and motor vehicle access requires a single system of regional transit with efficiency as the top priority, possible only with unified governance. What we have instead is a grab bag of disparate modes and lines planned by metro counties that will never get us to reasonable regional pedestrian access, because counties are not constitutional creatures of the federal government, and it is the federal government that funds what we call transitways to be built.

Designate a state agency as planner, builder and operator of metro-wide regional transit. It is the state, not counties, that have direct constitutional representation in Washington D.C.: our two senators and eight members of Congress. It should be their duty as state representatives to federal funders and regulators, to address and overcome the challenges we face in working with freight railroads, for example — entities that are also regulated not locally or regionally but rather federally, in Washington D.C.

The alternatives for designation are MNDoT or the Metropolitan Council, both state agencies with transportation missions. But there is a big difference between those missions.

MNDot has little to do with rail, and nothing to do with metropolitan transit. By contrast, the Metropolitan Council plans, builds and operates most metropolitan transit. Unfortunately, the one form of transit it does not plan — transitways — is also the one form of transit most lacking in the Metropolitan Council’s performance of its mission — regional planning and services. That must and should change.

Please support House File 3718, for the sake of sanity, of health, of the climate, of our children and descendants and of the future of humanity. Give pedestrians back the rights we had a century ago, before traffic engineers took them away.