



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2009
📶 23° in TWIN CITIES ([MORE CITIES](#))

[NEWS & FEATURES](#)

[EVENTS](#)

[MEMBERSHIP](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

[THE CURRENT](#)

[CLASSICAL](#)

[LISTEN
PLAYLIST](#)

[LISTEN
PLAYLIST](#)

[NEWS](#)

[LISTEN
SCHEDULE](#)

[RADIO HEARTLAND](#)

[: WONDERGROUND RADIO](#)

[RADIO](#) [Programs](#)

MnDOT seeks input on tough, 20-year transportation plan

by [Dan Olson](#), Minnesota Public Radio
February 18, 2009



[EMBED](#) | [HELP](#)

SPONSOR:

[support
this program](#)

What is Minnesota's transportation plan for the next 20 years? That's the question state officials are putting to the public. The planners want people to weigh in on how to plan Minnesota's transportation system for the next two decades. The planners admit there's nothing close to the amount of money coming in to pay for all the ideas.

St. Paul, Minn. — Highway 14 across southern Minnesota is a killer. With more than 125 fatalities over the past 20 years, it's one of the state's deadliest roadways.

Safety improvements on highway 14 over the past few decades are an example of how successful local lobbying helps form the state transportation plan, according to Minnesota Transportation Alliance executive director Margaret Donahue.

"It's largely because of those local efforts that highway 14 is gradually being expanded to a four lane highway," she says.

Donahue heads the state's largest and oldest transportation lobby group. The MTA's interests range from improving rural roads for handling heavier loads to more transit options in the Twin Cities.

Progress on both is spotty. Part of the reason, Donahue says, is the state lacks a vision of what it wants in a transportation system.

"The alternative has been that individual communities have worked their individual projects and some would argue it has been a very Balkanized system." To get the discussion started planners have put together a wish list of projects all over the state. The price tag for all of them - roads, bridges, transit, rail, airports, waterways - comes in at about \$65 billion.

The estimate of actual revenue that will be in hand - fuel taxes, other user fees, borrowing, federal funds - is about \$15 billion.

Roughly a \$40 billion gap.

One way to bridge the gap, though an unlikely option, is a \$2 to \$3 a gallon increase in the fuel tax.

Minnesota needs a transportation plan that recognizes the finite resources and also takes into consideration an aging population, says Barb Thoman, a program consultant for Transit for Livable Communities.

MnDOT planners agree.

The agency's draft plan points to the dramatic surge in the state's number of older residents as the wheel of time turns.

Thoman, at a recent meeting in a first ring Twin Cities suburb, heard an earful from elderly residents about what they want.

"People were saying, 'I need some more options for the future and I want to see some transit investments that aren't here in this region today,'" she says.

The MnDOT draft transportation plan for 2008 to 2028 is straightforward in describing decisions made over the past 50 years:

- Minnesota has built the country's fifth most extensive road system.
- The Twin Cities is ahead of many other metropolitan areas in the number of miles of freeway that have been built.
- The miles of pavement rated, 'poor' by MnDOT will triple from about 600 to about 1,800 miles in the next 10 years given the money available.

Elwyn Tinklenberg, MnDOT commissioner from 1999 to 2003, is keenly aware of the vast size of the transportation wish list compared to the money available.

Minnesota has dug itself into a big hole in not keeping up with maintenance on Minnesota's 132,000 miles of roadway and nearly 20,000 bridges, Tinklenberg says. He is wary of any plan that creates geographic winners and losers.

"We cannot afford to have a state in which only certain regions are economically viable and the rest are kind of isolated," he says.

The stimulus plan signed into law by President Obama yesterday will deliver a gush of transportation funding to Minnesota, maybe something approaching \$600 million.

The list of stimulus winners among transportation projects is already in hand.

They include an \$86 million, five mile extension of freeway 610 in the northwest suburbs and in northern Minnesota expansion of highway 53 from Duluth to International Falls, among dozens of other projects.

Then the stimulus money goes away leaving the state with the task of deciding how to plan the transportation system for the next two decades.

There's a public hearing with video conferencing on the plan March 26th.

©2009 Minnesota Public Radio | All rights reserved
480 Cedar Street, Saint Paul, MN USA 55101 | 651-290-1212