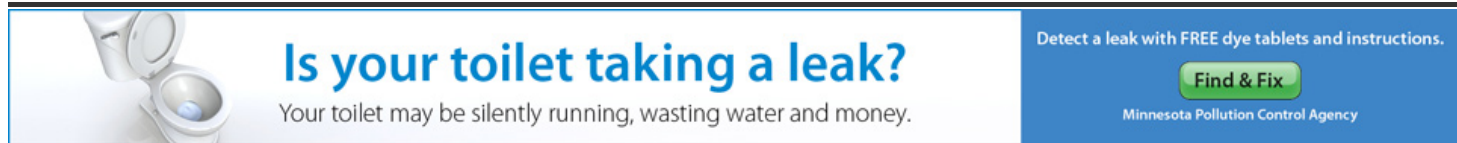


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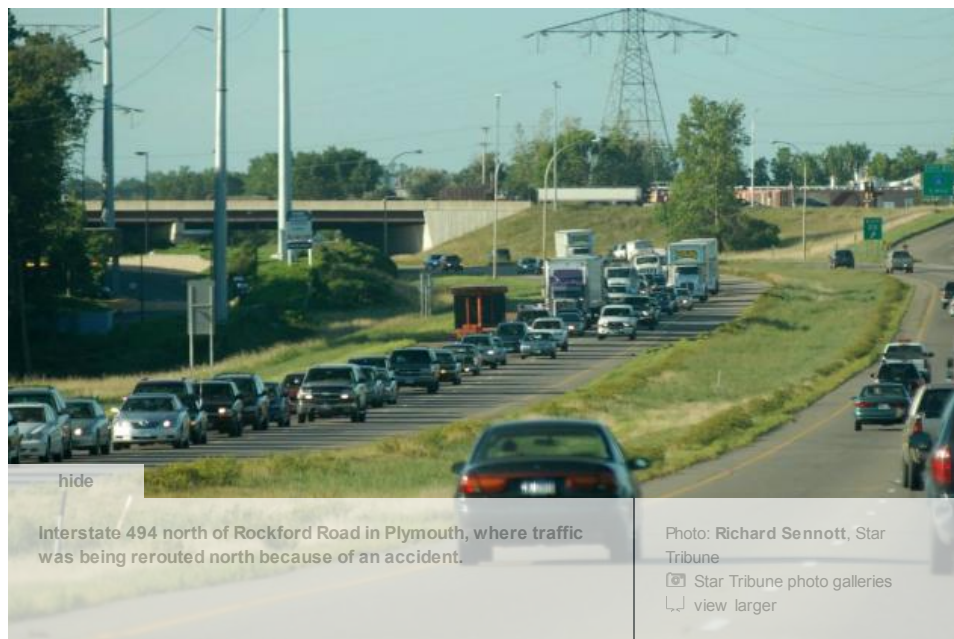
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In Minnesota, transportation needs attention statewide

Article by: VICKI JENSEN and JASON METSA Updated: May 6, 2013 - 5:50 AM

Only a long-term, statewide plan deserves a vote this year.



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As first-term legislators, we've had the opportunity to thoughtfully weigh in and tackle numerous challenging issues, including balancing the state's budget and implementing the new state-run health care exchange. While some issues at the Capitol will always be contentious, we never thought that transportation funding and policy would join the ranks of taxes and health care.

Before our elections to the Legislature last year, we worked with local governments and businesses to make our communities strong and prosperous. We worked with our local chambers of commerce to ensure that priorities like schools and transportation were funded. Transportation has always been a nonpartisan issue, because every Minnesotan understands the need for good roads, bridges and transit systems to move people, goods and services.

Once elected, we eagerly requested to serve on the House and Senate transportation committees because our legislative districts and regions had pressing transportation needs. It was also an

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opportunity to work with a diverse group of lawmakers from across the state to develop a comprehensive transportation initiative that put Minnesotans to work on new roads and transit systems and provided safety on the state's most dangerous highways.

Unfortunately, Minnesota faces a \$21 billion transportation deficit. That means our transportation needs significantly outpace the available funding for roads and bridges. Even during this legislative session, lawmakers have submitted more than \$1.4 billion in transportation requests that cannot be met, because we lack the ability to adequately fund transportation.

Our infrastructure needs are going unmet. In the Twin Cities, highway congestion requires the state to expand Interstate 494 in Plymouth. Hwy. 23 from Willmar to Paynesville needs to be upgraded from two to four lanes to improve safety and better connect our regional centers. Work on Hwy. 14 from Dodge Center to Owatonna, one of the state's most deadly highways, has been anticipated by the Minnesota Department of Transportation for more than 30 years, yet it isn't in the agency's long-term construction plans.

The state faces challenges meeting an agreement from 1960 to move Hwy. 53 from Eveleth to Virginia to meet growing economic development needs. A new road was expected to be in place by 2017, but that is now in question. In the lakes region, MnDOT has even suggested that expanding Hwy. 371 in 2018 may be postponed because of lack of funding. These road projects are requirements for Minnesota's economy to fully recover and grow even stronger.

Minnesota must meet its transportation obligations across the state. While we believe a Twin Cities-only sales tax dedicated to transit may help improve mobility in the seven-county metropolitan area, it does not help Minnesota's 80 other counties that are looking for needed infrastructure funding to build and maintain roads and bridges.

We have important transportation needs in Greater Minnesota and we cannot afford to wait while our highways become more dangerous and costly to fix. That's why more than 60 counties have passed resolutions asking the Legislature for new funding for a comprehensive transportation package. Minnesota needs a long-term solution.

Minnesotans want their leaders to lead on issues, and transportation is not an exception. Minnesota needs a comprehensive, balanced transportation package this session.

Anything short of this doesn't deserve a vote this year — and it will not get ours.

Senator Vicki Jensen, DFL-Owatonna, is a member of the Minnesota Senate. Jason Metsa, DFL-Eveleth, is a member of the Minnesota House.



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