

## MINNEHAHA BRIDGE EXPANSION

Ron Mead

The Highway Department is planning to widen the 35W bridge over Minnehaha Creek beginning next Spring. The Creek is presently crossed by two separate bridges, each carrying 3 traffic lanes and approximately 45 feet wide with over 30 feet of open space between the structures. The proposed bridge will be about 144 feet wide. It will still carry 3 lanes in each direction.

If the highway is no larger, why do they need a bigger bridge? The Highway Department originally argued that the bridge was in danger of collapse and must be rebuilt. And if it's being rebuilt, they must rebuild it to current standards. They latter admitted, however, it isn't unsafe and the needed repairs could be done without widening.

While the current bridge is **not** unsafe, one hundred and forty-four feet of poorly-lighted space beneath the proposed bridge will be, according to Minneapolis Park Police.

So why a bigger bridge? To provide high-speed bus service to Burnsville, of course.

How will the water in the Creek be affected? No one knows; MnDOT argues it is the higher agency and does not need a permit from the Watershed District.



What kind of present is MnDOT's final 35W EIS going to be?

## WHEN IS A PUBLIC HEARING NOT A PUBLIC HEARING?

The Minneapolis City Council Transportation and Public Works Committee (TAPW) held a special meeting in September in City Hall to hear a staff update on the 35W project. In a rambling, hour-long presentation, City staff seemed to find all the Highway Department proposals **unacceptable** and yet concluded that the City should accept whatever the engineers eventually recommend.

During the meeting, Committee Chair Walter Dziedzic announced public testimony concerning 35W would be taken at a public hearing to be held at Ramsey School in south Minneapolis in October. All Council Members on TAPW would be expected to attend although, following the meeting, Council Members Alice Rainville and Pat Scott indicated that they would not be there.

On October 19, a meeting was, in fact, held at Ramsey but it had been downgraded from a "Public Hearing" to a "Community Meeting", a distinction which seems to have great significance to bureaucrats and their attorneys. The meeting was co-chaired by Eleventh Ward Council Member Dore Mead and Sixth Ward Council Member Jim Niland. Council Members Dziedzic and Steve Minn, both members of TAPW, also did not attend. Although not a member of TAPW, Tenth Ward Council Member Lisa McDonald was present.

Over seven hundred City and suburban residents packed the Ramsey auditorium. The dozens of citizens who had the opportunity to testify in the two and a half hours available were nearly unanimous in their opposition to any highway expansion and their support for effective public transportation.

Virtually everyone reiterated the "*Trains Not Lanes*" theme. All spoke from unique perspectives with personal anecdotes about the negative impacts that an all-car transportation system has on their lives.

Their stories included:

Children with asthma, which has reached epidemic proportions in urban areas,

Constant noise and cracked windows, plaster and plumbing from vibrations, Loss of wildlife and destruction of vegetation in Diamond Lake and Grass Lake,

Loss of property value and inability to sell because of the threat of expansion, Loss of access to former jobs relocated to outer suburbs, and

Loss of community and destruction of neighborhoods from acquisition for other highway expansion projects.

Several testifiers took the City Council to task for not showing up to hear their citizens' viewpoints, noting that testifying to Mead and Niland, long-term 35W activists, was like "preaching to the choir". Time after time, the question was asked "Where is the Mayor?", who seems to have vanished from the 35W debate.

The audience seemed pleased, however, that State Senators Jane Ranum and Carol Flynn testified at the meeting, as did State Representatives Jean Wagenius, Myron Orfield, Karen Clark and Linda Wejcman.

The elected officials were encouraged to take responsibility for this crucial policy decision. The decision of whether to continue with a car-based transportation system or to chart a new direction that could revitalize the inner city, the downtown business district, the neighborhoods and the entire region will determine what kind of city we have in the future. Such a momentous decision should not be left to the bureaucrats and engineers.



## ST. LOUIS LRT IS AN OVERWHELMING SUCCESS

*Metropolitan LRT Joint Powers Board*

Representatives from St. Louis who are involved with that city's new light rail transit (LRT) system visited the Twin Cities area Wednesday, Nov. 2, to talk about the success of the St. Louis system.

In operation for about 14 months, the 18-mile St. Louis Metrolink has exceeded all expectations in terms of number of riders and acceptance of the system.

The current weekday ridership of 39,540 already exceeds the twenty year forecast. St. Louis has also found that 79 percent of the Metrolink riders are new transit riders. While work trips account for about 41 percent of riders, more than 35 percent of the trips are for recreation or shopping.

"The acceptance has been overwhelming, and we're delighted," said John K. Leary, Jr., executive director of Bi-State Development Agency, the builder and operator of St. Louis Metrolink.

The St. Louis group met with Twin Cities area business leaders and elected officials. The visitors participated in a light-rail forum at the Minnesota History Center. The St. Louis group also met with state legislators and LRT advisory committee members during their visit to the Twin Cities, which was sponsored by the Metropolitan LRT Joint Powers Board.

Representatives from St. Louis included Thomas Shrout, executive director of the St. Louis Citizens for Modern Transit; Missouri state legislator Joan Bray; Steve Willis, deputy director of Bi-State Development Agency; and Jill Roach, formerly of the East-West Gateway Council and currently transportation director for the City of St. Louis.

Light rail also is gaining momentum in other parts of the United States. The Denver LRT system opened Oct. 7, 1994, and the light-rail system in Dallas is expected to open within a year.

In the Twin Cities metropolitan area, the first priority for LRT is the Central Corridor, an 11-mile route running from downtown St. Paul to downtown Minneapolis. Depending on funding, construction could begin in 1996. The next corridor to be constructed would be an extension of the Central Corridor, running along I-35W from downtown Minneapolis to 96th Street in Bloomington.

The Metropolitan LRT Joint Powers Board consists of commissioners appointed by the Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington County Regional Railroad Authorities.

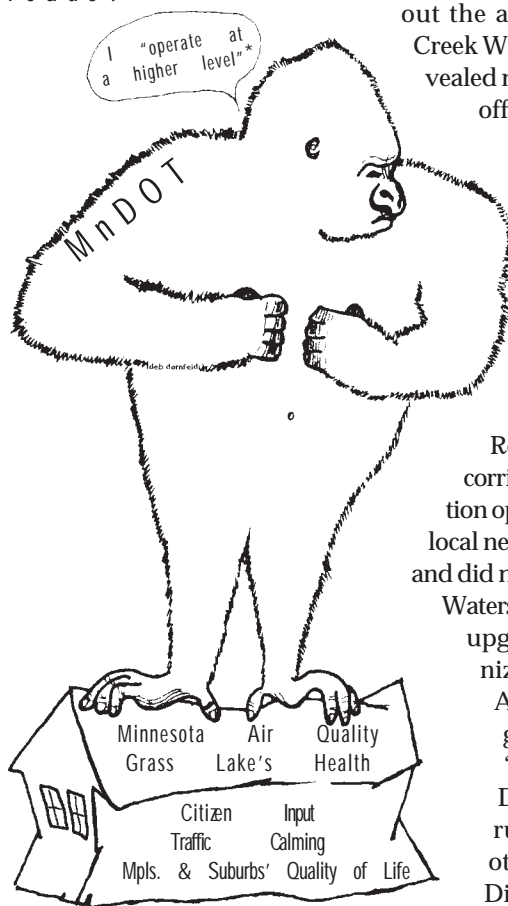
Contact: Ken Stevens, 348-4182, Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority

## GRASS LAKE, MEET CONCRETE JUNGLE

*Twin Cities Reader, Oct. 26-Nov. 1, 1994*

Grass Lake, nestled behind houses near the intersection of Crosstown Highway 62 and Interstate 35W, is small but treasured by area residents. Tom Ramsay and his wife, Nancy Goetzinger, have taken pains to photograph wild-life species not typically found in the area. But the couple has noticed the lake changing: No birds were seen last season and even cattails didn't grow.

Where does a 500 pound gorilla build roads?



\* actual MnDOT quote (see Grass Lake article)

Wherever it wants!

Last summer, the Minnesota Department of Transportation decided to upgrade the intersection of 35W and the Crosstown (less than a block away from Grass Lake) without the approval of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. MnDOT revealed no plan to deal with extra runoff created by the new highway ramp and bridge extension, and neighborhood residents and environmentalists say they never got the chance to express their opinions about the possible degradation of water quality in Grass Lake.

According to Craig Robinson, manager of the 35W corridor for MnDOT, his organization operates at a "higher level" than local neighborhood water authorities and did not need the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District's approval for the upgrade. Frank Hornstein, organizing director of Clean Water Action Alliance, a lobbying group, sees it differently: "What you have here is the Department of Transportation running roughshod over another agency." The Watershed District is reviewing the legality of MnDOT's apparent disregard of its authority.

*Article reprinted with permission of the Twin Cities Reader.*

A recent study in San Francisco documented that proximity to rapid transit saves families on average of \$396 per month.

Armed with these statistics, the Center for Neighborhood Technology is now working with Federal National Mortgage Association to develop a "location-efficient mortgage" that would recognize that money you don't spend on transportation is available to service a larger mortgage.

*The Center for Neighborhood Technology Newsletter, Fall 1994*

## Solo Commuting is Growing Fastest Here

"America's most solitude-loving people may be in Minneapolis, MN." In the U.S., if you pick the 40 metropolitan counties with the fastest growth rate in solo commuting (1980 to 1990) and a more than average use of solo commuting, 6 are in the Mpls./St. Cloud area. *American Demographics, October 1993*

## NTN GETS ITS DAY IN COURT

Ron Mead

On Nov. 16, 1994, Bruce Rasmussen, NTN legal counsel and partner in the firm of Rasmussen, Duckson and Carlson, argued NTN's case before the Eighth Circuit Appellate Court. NTN filed a law suit against MnDOT nearly two years ago over the so-called "interim third lane" in Bloomington and Burnsville. NTN contended that expanding the highway while the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was being prepared violated the letter and the intent of the law requiring the EIS. MnDOT argued that the lanes were "temporary" and would be removed when the real reconstruction takes place sometime between now and the year 2020.

In Nov. 1993, the Federal trial judge bought MnDOT's contention that highway lanes that are only in place for 25 years can be considered temporary.

In November, 1994, one day after the "interim" lanes were officially opened to traffic, the NTN appeal was heard by the Appeals Court. Rasmussen contended that there was no basis in law for the lower court's decision because MnDOT itself had defined the scope and

length of the reconstruction project and the interim lanes were clearly within those limits. MnDOT simply reiterated its position that the interim lanes will be taken out when the time comes.

The bulk of the discussion centered on the question of "mootness." MnDOT feels because the lanes have been built and because they plan to issue the EIS later this month, the question of whether or not the lanes were added illegally is in fact moot.

On NTN's behalf, Rasmussen contended the situation is capable of being repeated (e.g., the rebuilding of the western junction of 35W and Crosstown rebuilt this summer without environmental review and the proposed expansion of the 35W bridge over Minnehaha Creek without environmental review) and that the length of the judicial process should not provide the cover needed to avoid any type of review.

Rasmussen's assessment of the hearing was that there is at least a 60% chance that the Court will rule the question moot. Beyond that he was cautiously pleased with the tone of the questions and comments from the judges.

### MnDOT Highway Engineer, overheard outside a courtroom:

"MAC (Metropolitan Airports Commission) has to do better on public participation. They're not nice guys like us. If they don't start including Wisconsin in the planning process, we won't build the highway expansions they'll want."

## Room for Public Participation *from page 4*

quite possible that we will see the 80 miles of planned HOV lanes before we will see the two proposed LRT lines. As Turriffin suggests, the vested interests, both commercial and governmental, have little interest in change in spite of all the environmental damage, social and economic costs of an automobile driven society.

In summary, Turriffin advances three benefits of public participation in transportation decision making:

1. A more inclusive decision-making process facilitates innovative policy outcomes.
2. A more inclusive decision-making process may revitalize an unresponsive decision making process, and
3. A more inclusive decision-making process will lead to a more balanced transportation system.

In congressional testimony in 1968, the president of the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO, now AASHTO) stated "to allow local people to have a greater voice in the highway location and design for which they are not trained would negate the experience of the trained highway official." It would seem that this attitude still prevails. This is unfortunate, as public input would not negate but would only enhance the experience of the trained highway official to the great benefit of our region's people and environment.

*Bringing the Public Back into Transportation Decision-Making, Some Case Studies and Reflections by Anton H. Turriffin, Department of Sociology and Arts, York University, Toronto, Canada, M3J 1P3*

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## ROOM FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?

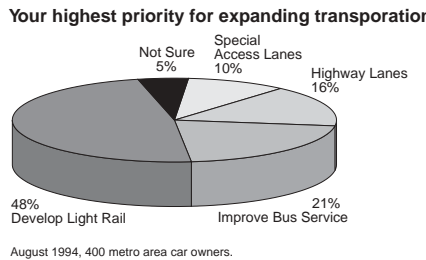
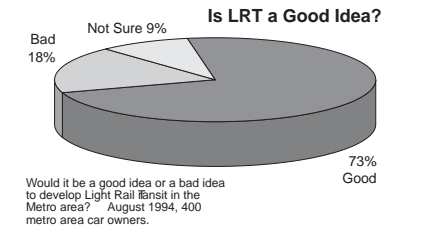
John DeWitt

Recognition that public input is a vital part of transportation and transit planning is nothing new. A good example is found in a joint Metropolitan Transit Commission and Metropolitan Council status report on transit planning in 1971 which stated:

"Citizen participation is needed at all stages of the program beginning with a critique of previous planning, establishment of objectives and extending through route selection and design. Lines of communication will be established and maintained which will not only seek the views of those affected by the program but demonstrate to them in ways they understand that their views receive full and sincere consideration in developing the transit plans."

The ISTEA legislation which passed in 1991, while less comprehensive, does require that the public be given a reasonable opportunity to comment on the development of long range transportation plans and directs governors to ensure that the public is involved in developing a state's required three-year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). In spite of this long-standing need, it seems that relatively little public participation is tolerated in transportation decision making in Minnesota. And when the public does get its nose in the decision making tent, its input is relatively ineffective.

Tony Turrittin at York University in Toronto attempts to explain this resistance to public participation in a paper on transportation decision making. He writes that transportation policy has traditionally been played out in a context of elite politics where the decision-makers are a com-



"You can draw any kind of pictures you like on a clean slate and indulge your every whim in the wilderness in laying out a New Delhi, Canberra, or Brasilia, but when you operate in an overbuilt metropolis you have to hack your way with a meat axe."

*From Robert Moses, City Construction Coordinator for New York, 1964; found in Reclaiming our Cities by David Engwicht.*

bination of key politicians, top government bureaucrats, and commercial interest groups. This would appear to be the situation in Minnesota. Note that while there is room for auto dealers and other vested interests, there is no room for the public. He goes on to write that he believes the public is ahead of both planners and politicians in their willingness to be less auto-dependent.

St. Louis, a region similar to ours in many ways, has experienced great success with their new Light Rail Transit (LRT) system. The fact nearly 350,000 people used the system over the extended Fourth of July

## Another Survey Shows Big Support for Light Rail

A landslide of respondents in a recent telephone survey think that developing light rail transit in the Twin Cities metropolitan area is a good idea. Nearly half think LRT should have the highest spending priority (when picking between LRT, more highway lanes, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, and improved bus service).

"When asked how they thought traffic volumes could be reduced in the metro area, 40 percent mentioned (unaided) LRT as one of the options. LRT was the most frequently mentioned idea."

"... The sampling method screened out people who did not own cars or had not taken a car to an emissions inspection station. As a result, the poll under-represents the views of metro residents who depend on transit for their mobility."

"The distribution of the 400 respondents across the metro area matched the actual distribution of population among the seven counties in the region."

*Press Release from the LRT Joint Powers Board, September 26, 1994.*

weekend last summer reveals the extent to which they have readily included LRT as one of their transportation choices.

A pragmatic look at the transportation investments we're most likely to see in the Twin Cities, however, reveals the gap between public preferences and transportation policy. While many legislators are committed to LRT, there appears to be a lukewarm endorsement of LRT by key officials and some key politicians remain adamantly opposed to anything except highway expansion. In spite of a 5-1 preference for LRT over HOV lanes, it appears

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