NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

the NETWORKER

July/August 1995 Newsletter The Neighborhood Transportation Network

TRANSIT SPENDING GOING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

by Barb Thoman, Transit for Livable Communities

The MCTO held another round of public hearings in June to explain to riders how it plans to cut $8.5 million from its 1996 budget—a drop of 6 percent over 1995. The Metropolitan Council plans to balance the transit budget with a combination of service cuts, fare increases and the elimination of up to 300 jobs. The 10 percent of metro area households without a car will be hit the hardest by the cuts.

These service cuts and fare increases are sure to result in another decline in ridership, ridership that has already fallen steadily in the past two decades. Last year, ridership declined 1% over the previous year and is down 23% since 1980.

Budget problems at the MCTO are a result of several things, including state funding at a level $10 million less than requested by the Met Council. In addition, several multi-year federal grants for transit have ended, and the transit-share of the property tax in the metro area is capped.

The state gas tax and motor vehicle registration fees raised $800 million for road projects in 1994. These funds are not used for transit as the Minnesota constitution has not been interpreted to include transit as a "highway purpose." These two taxes raise over five times what is spent on transit in Minnesota.

Little of Minnesota's federal money is spent on transit—most of it goes for HOV lanes, roadway expansion, and traffic management. At a time when people are making more and longer trips, how can a shrinking bus system, charging higher fares, possibly lure new riders or even retain the ones it has now? How are low income people, senior citizens, and children supposed to get around?

Citizens must let their legislators know that the Twin Cities needs a greatly expanded mass transit system not a system that will slowly become irrelevant.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF MASS TRANSIT INVESTMENTS

by Michael E. O'Neal

This month I received my alumni magazine from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. In the article, "UM-St. Louis in the Next Generation," the author indicated that the MetroLink light rail line has helped to promote the communities access to advanced education. The article states:

> "When the MetroLink light-rail system opened in July 1993, University officials looked on with more than a little anxious interest. With two stations (on campus), the MetroLink held great promise for the campus."

"Every concept devised by metropolitan planners to expand and further develop the MetroLink now includes UM-St. Louis," says Chancellor Blanche M. Touhill. "It's a linkage that will forever tie UM-St. Louis to the St. Louis region's economic and cultural future.

One of the other benefits that has also been created from the infrastructure investment of the MetroLink is that students from the universities in the city can travel the LRT system from the schools major campuses to the medical schools. In fact, the UM-St. Louis and Washington University have developed the Joint Engineering Program using resources and facilities at both campuses to provide students with the opportunity to earn an undergraduate degree in engineering. This Joint Engineering Program has been cited as a national model for private and public colleges. In my opinion, it also shows how to best link public infrastructure and public education to sustain the viability of a metropolitan region.

This type of social investment in public infrastructure and education could also be developed in the Twin Cities. The vitality of the Twin Cities will be dependent on how we make our investments. It will also require the Governor, the Legislature, the Metropolitan Council and MnDOT to move beyond their restrictive definitions of transportation and "highway purposes" so the Twin Cities can achieve the full benefits of its regional investment strategies.

THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT: STORMWATER MANAGEMENT VERSUS FREEWAYS

By James R. Spensley

"City of Lakes" — and streams, shorelines, trees, wetlands, the "mighty Mississippi." Minneapolis and the entire Metro area drain into the Mississippi River. Our sewage effluent is discharged into the river at Pig's Eye Island.

The past two decades Minneapolis made a the tremendous effort to separate the sanitary sewers from the storm sewers, to reduce stormwater pollution, to control floods, and to address lake water quality and floodplain development. Minneapolis is fortunate to have long ago reserved most floodplains as parks, open spaces, or natural areas. But the prior systems were so inadequate, so limited, that we still have a long way to go.

Runoff carries pollutants and sediments to bodies of water. Land development greatly accelerates the process by increasing both runoff and sedimentation. Streets, roofs, and other hard surfaces prevent rains and melting snow from soaking into the ground. Development usually changes the land, increasing slopes and eliminating local depressions, so the runoff flows more quickly.

In an urban area, few ponds, natural wetlands, or creeks have been spared modification. In Minneapolis, our precious lakes became the "treatment facilities" and sediment traps in our storm water management system. They replaced the upstream ponds, wetlands, and depressions that were filled in as the City grew.

"Stormwater Management" continued on pg. 3

BENEFITS OF TRAFFIC CALMING

A 1993 report for the Federal Highway Administration described the results of traffic calming demonstration projects in six German cities and towns. Speed limits were reduced from 50 Km / h (30 mph) to 30 km / h (18 mph). The results were:

- 60% decrease in injuries
- 43-53% reduction in fatalities
- 50% decrease in air pollution
- 12% decrease in fuel consumption

Since Germany is the home of the Autobahn and BMW, it is not surprising that the German Auto Club was skeptical of official results. The club did its own research on the acceptance of the lower speed limit and found that after initial opposition:

Driver approval grew from 27% to 67%

Resident approval grew from 30% to 75%

A report from the Transport Research Laboratory in the United Kingdom analyzed the likelihood of a pedestrian being killed when struck by a car traveling at different speeds. There was a 5% probability of a fatality at 20 mph, the speed limit in a traffic calmed area. The probability of a fatality rose to 85% at 40 mph which many suspect is close to the average speed of traffic on Minneapolis streets such as Lyndale.

Traffic Calming & Local Business

European experience has shown that the friendlier environment resulting from traffic calming attracts more people, and produces increased economic activity provided that there is an adequate public transportation system or convenient access on foot or bicycle.

A British study of 10 European cities looked at the economic effects of traffic calming strategies. It found that environmental improvement and a healthy economy were causally related. It found that traffic calming was associated with higher rents and higher value of residential real estate. Contrary to common belief, there was little or no relationship between retail turnover and the provision of car parking.

Conclusion

The Twin Cities is at a crossroads. We can continue the transportation policies of the past and attempt to move ever greater numbers of cars at ever greater speeds with little or no concern for the impact on the neighborhoods through which they pass. Or, we can start to implement traffic calming strategies such as those found in Portland, Oregon, and hundreds of other cities worldwide which strengthen our urban neighborhoods while cutting pollution and fuel consumption.

We can no afford to perpetuate planning strategies which have met with little success in the past. We must reexamine our priorities and we must turn excuses into challenges.

We can choose to make our neighborhoods places for people rather than conduits for cars.

Note: Mayor Sayles Belton and the Minneapolis City Council are now including traffic calming in the City's Housing Principles.

ISTEA RULES

From "Flexible Funding Opportunities for transportation Investment FY '95"

Public Involvement

ISTEA further requires that participation in the development of plans, programs, and projects extend beyond institutional entities and embrace the concerns of the general public. To the extent that transportation investment decisions have far-reaching economic, environmental, and social effects upon the communities they impact, the involvement of the public is critical in helping MPOs (metropolitan planning organizations) and States address community values and needs. Furthermore, an ongoing and open public participation process, which provides the public with *early* opportunities for input into plans and programs, helps to build broad-based consensus for these planning efforts and minimize dissatisfaction with resulting transportation improvements.

Public involvement should be a significant element of metropolitan and statewide planning, programming, and project prioritizing processes, as well as MIS (major investment study) and management system activities. An educated and informed public is the key to ensuring that this involvement is meaningful, productive, and ultimately reflects *community* goals for transportation, economic development, and quality of life.

Glossary

CBD Central Business District

CBP Congestion Based Pricing, a road user tax

DOT Department of Transportation (Federal)

EPA Environmental Protection Agency

FHWA Federal Highway Administration (part of the U.S. DOT)

FTA Federal Transit Administration

HOV High Occupancy Vehicle (not a SOV)

ISTEA Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act

LRT Light Rail Transit

MCTO Metropolitan Council Transit Operations (was the MTC)

Met Council Metropolitan Council, the MPO for the Twin Cities

MnDOT Minnesota Department of Transportation

MPO Metropolitan Planning Organization, a main contact between the DOT and a region

MPCA Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

SOV Single Occupancy Vehicle

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

To comment on this or previous newsletters, or to submit articles for future publication, contact us at the office (872-4079). To join our newsletter committee call Laurie Frevert at 823-4504.

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NTN promotes social justice and environmental responsibility in the provision of transportation facilities, especially for the neighborhoods adjacent to Interstate 35W in Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington and Burnsville.

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Stormwater Management *from page 1*

Thirty years ago, 35W was constructed through this neighborhood, and at that time the builder's drainage concerns were limited to maintaining safety by conveying stormwater off the pavement as fast as possible — no hydroplaning, no wet brakes, no splashing to add to the accident rate during rainy weather.

Large ditches and frequent catch basins convey runoff into huge pipes that lead into Minnehaha Creek (Lake Nokomis and Lake Hiawatha), Diamond Lake, Grass Lake, and storm tunnels to the River. Unfortunately (and unforgivably, because erosion at construction sites was a well understood problem even then), 35W drainage facilities were constructed and in place before the ditches and steep side slopes were revegetated. Then thunderstorms inundated South Minneapolis which carried away tons of soil and sand. It reduced Diamond Lake's volume by perhaps 40% and permanently changed its character.

In 1967, the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District was established to plan and regulate stormwater management in this drainage area, including "landlocked" areas or subwatersheds with no outlet, such as Grass Lake-Richfield Lake. Today its rules require erosion barriers during construction, storage of any increased runoff volume from a 100-year storm event, no runoff rate increase, and effective water quality treatment. Already developed, 35W still drains into our creek and lakes .

Expanding 35W while meeting current stormwater management rules and environmental laws was found to be virtually impossible in the EIS studies. The cost of diverting highway runoff into storm tunnels for flood control is immense. The runoff delivers a load of pollutants and sediments that must be treated before they can be discharged into the Mississippi River.

Even if 35W doesn't expand, the cost of updating the facilities for adequate flood control and water treatment is staggering.

The City has an ongoing plan to upgrade stormwater management facilities to a five-year storm standard* and to begin restoration of natural areas. 35W is presently a large contributor of dirty water into this system. Stormwater management and lake water quality are burdens — as are noise and air pollution, burdens shouldered by Minneapolis to support Interstate transportation.

This conflict pits transportation verses stormwater management. It's a question of priorities for the Metro area. To protect our natural environment — lakes, streams, wetlands — will increase the cost of highways and other developments.

It is tempting for the government to "mitigate" these costs by allowing environmental degradation here in return for gains elsewhere: allow an urban wetland to be filled in if one is constructed or enlarged elsewhere. These issues are debated in the relative obscurity of administrative rules hearings and legislative commissions. Here, I fear, the urban surface water environment will be considered already lost and too costly to restore or enhance.

Our Richfield neighbors are ready to use Richfield Lake and Wood Lake (a large Class 2 wetland) and other seasonal wetland depressions (Type 6) as a drainage way for roadway expansions and commercial developments. Minneapolitans must counter this desire to sacrifice our urban environment.

* The City expects developed property to be flooded at least twice per decade.

Mr. Spensley served as a Manager of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District for nine years, five years as its President. He is a member of the Mpls. Citizen's Advisory Commission on Water Quality.

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING? NTN NEEDS YOU! CALL MICHAEL O'NEAL AT 872-4079

Cut along this line and mail to NTN, Suite 100, 1901 Elliot Ave. So., Minneapolis, MN 55404

Dear NTN: I want to help NTN influence what happens to 35W and other transportation corridors.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

I'd like to be involved, I'd like to contribute

My time ❑ just give me a call ❑ and even some money ❑

Like 10 Dollars for the Newsletter ❑ or a small fortune ❑ $____

Please make your tax deductible check out to: The Neighborhood Transportation Network

TRAFFIC PRIMER:

Myth: Increasing the speed increases the flow of traffic. Many people think traffic is like water in a garden hose, to fill a bucket faster just increase the pressure (speed of the water through the hose).

Reality: Traffic is more comparable to people leaving a theatre. You can increase the flow to a certain point, any faster just increases the chance for a complete breakdown (i.e. traffic jam). You learned this lesson in kindergarten during every fire drill when your teacher pleaded, "Walk, don't run!"

Another perspective: the recommended following distance is one car length for every 10 mph. Assume 11 ft. car lengths and do the math. At 30 mph, 3 car lengths separate cars and 60 cars pass by every minute. Increase the speed to 60 mph and 68.57 cars pass by. At 90 mph it's 72 cars. Increasing the speed has almost no effect on flow (cars passing by per minute). Turning up the pressure doesn't fill the bucket any faster even if we drive at race car speeds!

NTN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

July 22 . . . . Lynd-Lake

July 27 . . . . HPDL's Picnic in the Park

August 20 . . Cedarfest

NTN wants to participate at your neighborhood event. Please contact our office (872-4079) so we can keep your community informed. NTN volunteers are also needed to help at our information booth during these events, to volunteer please call (872-4079).

CONGESTION BASED PRICING

Excerpts from "Congestion Pricing and 'Equity' Analysis" by Cameron Yee. The Bay Bridge Congestion Pricing Demonstration Program (BBCPDP) is in San Francisco.

1) What will the revenues from these programs be used for? While the proposed use of revenues from the BBCPDP is to mostly improve transit alternatives in the corridor, there is no guarantee that the revenues will actually be used in this manner. Revenues from such programs must be used to improve the overall mobility alternatives for the entire region's transportation system, not just for automobile users.

2) What kind of potential spillover effects on other freeways and corridors in the region will result from implementing the program? There will be health and air quality effects that impact other freeways and interchanges and the surrounding land uses. In the San Francisco Bay Area many of these are located in "flatland" communities where many people of color and low-income people live.

3) How will this type of program affect land use? Will it encourage or discourage sprawl? Will the transportation and land use link be better addressed? Higher income groups may find that improved travel time over the corridor means they can locate further away from their place of employment. Urban areas could become further deteriorated and impoverished while new suburbs chew up more farm land and open space. Many unanswered questions and uncertainties remain about how market-based policies will affect land use.

WAITING FOR THE ELECTION

Selected passages of a letter by Stephen J. Bahler from Alan R. Steger, FHWA, US DOT to Michael O'Neal of NTN

The Met Council's revised draft 2015 Transportation Policy Plan is currently under review. The 35W Preferred Alternative is listed in the plan as a study underway with no project funding, and therefore, is not expected to be included in the region's fiscally-constrained transportation plan. The FHWA, MnDOT, the Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota State Legislature are continuing to explore congestion / road pricing and other funding possibilities for large projects such as 35W. At the request of MnDOT, FHWA will delay making the record of decision until about December, 1996 when these studies are expected to be completed.

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