

CTS—CENTER FOR TRANSPORTATION STUDIES

Deb Dornfeld, Minneapolis

Buried not very deep in the recesses of the Civil & Mineral Engineering Building at the University of Minnesota lies the Center for Transportation Studies (CTS). The CTS was established in 1987 and receives funding from Minnesota's State Transportation Bill of 1991; some research projects are also funded by MnDOT, the Regional Transit Board (RTB), and the Minnesota Local Road Research Board.

Laurie McGinnis, a Research Coordinator for CTS, describes the Center's function as a liaison between academia, government, and other transportation researchers.

CTS is governed by a 13 member Executive Committee (with standing members from MnDOT, RTB, and the University's Institute of Technology, Carlson School of Management, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, and Office of the VP for Research), and provided with long-term direction by the 70-member Advisory Committee (with members from Minnesota government, business, and education).

One can only hope that members of MnDOT will mingle freely enough with proponents of "alternative" transportation that some kind of enlightenment will occur. Someone from MnDOT may actually read the RTB's Light Rail Transit research and bring some new ideas back to the office.

Research is divided into 6 areas, and each area is directed by a CTS council. The areas are:

1. Transportation and the Economy—Among its projects are an analysis of the 1990 Census of Population and Housing, to determine changing transportation requirements, and new models for Federal, State, and Local cooperation in infrastructure investment.
2. Transportation Safety and Traffic

Flow—Research with computer traffic flow simulations, traffic flow models, signage legibility, etc.

3. Transportation Infrastructure—Research that only a transportation techie could love; mainly studies of materials and road building techniques.
4. Transportation and the Environment—Probably the nearest to NTN members' hearts; includes research on the economics of alternative transportation, pollution impacts from major highways, improving access to mass transit, transit and land use strategies to enhance environmental quality, and economic incentives to reduce traffic congestion.
5. Transportation Education—Research aimed at improving existing transportation education programs at the U.
6. Transportation Information and Outreach—The function of this CTS council is to disseminate information gleaned from research from the above areas.

All research is available to public perusal; call 626-1077 for an updated list of projects if you're interested. I hope to review some of the research, and report on my findings in future issues of the Networker.

VITAL CONNECTIONS

by Christina Hakala

- Bikes, buses, trains.
- Bikes on buses.
- Bikes on trains.
- People walking, biking, rollerblading
- along linear parks.
- A railway, bikeway, walkway corridor along 29th Street.
- People connecting with nature along the Cedar Lake Trail.
- People walking, biking, talking.
- Neighbors.
- Neighborhoods connected.
- Transportation networks serving people.
- A sense of community.
- A love of nature.
- A sense of connectedness.
- Together, we make it happen.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Jay Walljasper, Minneapolis

Summer is bursting out all around me as I sit here in front of my computer. My face and hair still feel warm from the sunshine I soaked up a few minutes ago in the park across the street from my office. In Minnesota where I live, the northernmost of America's lower 48 states, spring is merely a concept: something we hear about in old love songs and even older romantic poems. In this part of the world the mercury shoots up from chilly to hot in a matter of days. We make a quick-change from thick jackets to shirtsleeves, with little opportunity to model this year's spring fashions.

I'm in a summery mood myself today, basking in the warmth of a hard-fought political victory. Last night more than 350 people packed the community center of a local park and offered an emphatic collective "NO" to city officials' plans to widen one of the avenues that cuts through our neighborhood. Planners from city hall, who once dismissed our complaints about the speed and volume of auto traffic as well-meaning but uninformed, quickly backed down from the project. After it was over, two hours of heartfelt and angry opposition to the plans with no one voicing the tiniest bit of support, they appeared grateful to be leaving the meeting all in one piece. For them, it was more than a harrowing experience, it was an education that people were fed up with the way American cities have been planned since World War II.

Minneapolis, my hometown and the central city of a metropolitan region of 2.3 million residents, has for many years aped Los Angeles in its approach to transportation and development issues. Freeways slash their way across the urban landscape and wide city streets welcome zooming autos. Bikes, buses, and pedestrians have figured in the plans of local transportation planners only as nuisances that impede the smooth flow of automobile traffic.

Most other North American cities took a close look at the transportation quagmire of southern California, and wisely decided that autos weren't the sole solution to 21st century transportation needs. Seventeen cities from San Diego to Calgary, Canada have built or added new light rail lines in the last ten years. Los Angeles, admitting the error of its ways, is busily building a subway, a commuter rail system, and a bicycle highway as well as light rail. A new housing development planned for the last undeveloped tract in the city of Los Angeles will feature narrow streets and pedestrian zones. Bikeways are popping up elsewhere across the country, including a very symbolic path that leads right to the U.S. capitol in Washington. The city of Seattle even has a pedestrian advocate in its planning department to review all new plans with an eye for pedestrians' needs.

Minneapolis has been a holdout in this tide toward new thinking about transportation. Local officials and newspaper editorialists believe that if they widen enough roads,

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A Message from America

from page 1

the auto can conveniently and safely carry everyone wherever they want to go, as if we were still living in the 1950s.

But local officials overlooked what their grand plans were doing to the city's neighborhoods. Minneapolis is a place where people sometimes like to stroll to a corner store for a quart of milk or walk their dogs around one of the city's many lakes, perhaps bumping into a neighbor along the way or savoring the season's first scent of lilacs and Russian olive trees. Unfortunately, transportation planners treat walking as if it were an archaic art practiced only by people too dense to pass a driver's license test. At least that was the case until last night.

The city planned to widen Lyndale avenue, which is one block from my house, so that it might qualify for special funding for road maintenance from the state of Minnesota. They expected no opposition. Who wouldn't want a nice, wide, smooth street?

Well, people in my neighborhood reacted immediately. Wider smoother streets mean increases in the speed and volume of traffic. An already busy street would become even harder to get across for people on foot and bicycles. That group includes not only weekend strollers and fitness buffs, but children, elderly people, disabled people, poor people, and others who do not have access to a car. A bunch of us in the neighborhood got together and vowed to fight the project. We badgered the city council to make sure there would be a public hearing on the widening project and then we circulated 3,000 flyers to every home in the area. We promoted traffic calming, an idea imported from the Netherlands that installs design features to slow the speed of auto traffic and remind motorists that they must share the streets with pedestrians. We outlined the idea of urban villages, a newly rediscovered notion of neighborhoods where people can meet many of their needs within walking distance of home. We proposed light rail. And then we waited nervously for the meeting. After all this was America. Perhaps most of our neighbors would enthusiastically welcome wider streets.

Our fears turned out to be unfounded. The crowd was resoundingly against the project, and more than 300 added their names to a list of volunteers wanting to explore reducing traffic on the street by turning it into a parkway. It was clear that a new era in transportation planning had begun in Minneapolis.

Jay Walljasper, editor of the Unte Reader, wrote this article for his column in the English magazine, Resurgence.

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CENTRAL CORRIDOR TRANSIT STUDIES MOVING FORWARD

MnDOT, Hennepin and Ramsey County today announced that in response to public input, three important issues will receive further study in the continuing evaluation of future transit improvements in the Interstate 94 "Central Corridor" between Minneapolis and St. Paul. The additional studies are not expected to significantly delay future implementation of improvements in the corridor.

The issues identified for study are a proposed Light Rail Transit (LRT) tunnel through downtown Minneapolis, emerging technology in the area of "low-floor" LRT rail

AN OPINION PIECE . . .

*Father John E. Forliti
Pastor, Saint Olaf Parish*

Some years ago on a plane to Washington, D.C., I was thoroughly engrossed by an editorial about city life. The thesis of this article was that human beings are basically made for the city. The city, not the suburbs, and not the rural area, is where God meant most people to live! I do not recall all the particulars which the author used to fortify his thesis, but I know I agreed with a good deal of it.

In recent months while staying for a time in a suburb, I realized anew how right that author was. I was absolutely dependent upon a car. When I needed some stamps, had to get a haircut, wanted to go to church, ran out of toothpaste, or any of a thousand other things, I had no choice but to hop in the car and drive. I am convinced that suburban living costs everybody too much. Think of the duplication of roads, sewers, cable television, police and fire, schools, churches, libraries, shopping malls, etc., etc. Suburban sprawl might well be the most extravagant waste of resources in the history of civilization!

Almost nobody but Father Dave and I live within walking distance of where we work!!!

Fly into Germany, Italy, or other European cities. Notice how farmland is preserved for farming, and cities for the majority populace to live and work. They have some respect for their environment!

We Americans are reckless in our exploitation of resources!

Think of the money we would save on school buses and schools if more

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cars and a recently released study by the Metropolitan Council on impacts of LRT in the metropolitan area. These issues were those most frequently raised during the recent public hearing process on transit proposals for the Central Corridor.

The three government units are working together on the Central Corridor project in a formal decision-making partnership known as the Joint Lead Agencies (JLA).

"It is our duty and responsibility to fully examine significant issues raised by the public in the hearing process," Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin said. "An LRT tunnel in Minneapolis has been growing in importance to many downtown residents and businesses, but to this point we have not had the authority to fully study such a proposal. With the emphasis the tunnel received in the hearings, now is the time to examine that issue further."

The Met. Council also recently released a report, "Keeping the Twin Cities Vital: Impacts of Light Rail Transit on the fully Developed Area." The report examines the anticipated impacts of LRT, and the potential benefits as a development tool that may be achieved if LRT is constructed in the region.

people lived in the city next to their schools, within earshot of their churches and libraries and shopping centers, and places of work. Low density is the major problem facing our cities. People live too far apart!

Where's the Metropolitan Council when we need them??? Is nobody doing any city planning? Is exploitation of resources the primary principle governing metro expansion?

These days the Twin Cities are talking about Light Rail Transit. I'd love to see it be successful. But are Twin Citians ready to give up their love-affair with the automobile? Not until rush hour is a two hour crawl on the freeway, each way! We don't have the density. Sprawl is our enemy!

Business leaders: Do you want to help reverse urban decay? Create new jobs in the core of the city. Government leaders: Do you want to do something significant for the common good? Control suburban sprawl!

Live in the city, get out of your cars and walk the neighborhoods. Meet the people who share responsibility for your community. Care about every kid growing up in your back yard. Have a Sunday back yard barbecue, sit on the front stoop and say hi to your neighbors, make a place for seniors to sit and have something to watch besides the mindless TV. Gather around the city square, the local park, or community center and just converse. We don't have enough people solving the world's problems anymore, and the world is the lesser for it!

Yes, the city is where it's at! It's where people were meant to be! Out of the cars and back on the hoof.

Experts and Public Policy

from page 4

we have more experience, more training and more education in every possible field. We understand how our own neighborhood works better than the experts ever can; we have travelled everywhere in the world; we've seen what others have tried and what has worked.

Our only vested interest is our neighborhood and making our part of the world work better. For the bureaucrats, finding the best solution is not as important as avoiding responsibility for anything that goes wrong. In practice that means never, ever do anything innovative or creative; let someone else take the risk!

While the "experts" view public input as a necessary evil that requires them to occasionally sit through a public meeting, public input and participation is our right and our duty. It is the only real source of creativity in the process of determining public policy. We are the real experts.

Our job is to attend the public meetings, to forcefully explain the damage to our neighborhoods, to propose creative solutions and let our elected officials know they will have our support if they stand up for the city. This is not being selfish or "NIMBY." It is being a responsible citizen.

This is not being anti-suburb. This is helping the region develop rational transportation and land use policies that will benefit us all. The city will remain vital; the suburbs will be less congested and the country will remain rural.

It is often said that technology makes a good servant and poor master. The same is also true of government and governmental agencies. Even the best servants require supervision.

Bertrand Russell never met our "transportation experts."

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"The Metropolitan Council's report is one of the best studies on the link between LRT, economic development and land use in this area I have seen," Ramsey County Commissioner John T. Finley said. "We need to look at the Council's work very carefully and incorporate their findings in our decision process."

The JLA also agreed that emerging technology for low floor LRT rail cars should be examined further. Low floor cars allow passengers to enter

PEOPLE, EVENTS AND IDEAS

by Christina Hakala

More and more people are actively designing our transportation future. Citizen involvement is on the rise. We are sharing our ideas. We are working with planners, engineers and others to design a better transportation system. Piece by piece, our back-to-neighborhood vision of connectedness—which is what first inspired our transportation systems—is becoming reality.

Your involvement is important. We need people to share ideas, lay out possible designs and communicate the basic idea to others. We need to get others involved. More people, more progress.

More events! June 11: **Interneighborhood Visioning Conference** for the 29th Street Midtown Greenway—call for info packet: Joan Vanhala, 874-1711. July 26, 7:00 p.m.: **1994 Bike Route Planning Extravaganza** at the Nicollet Island Pavilion—call Christina Hakala at 333-3249 for details.

Transportation projects require money. Why don't we establish a special foundation? A woman from the Willamette Pedestrian Coalition in Portland, Oregon told me that she would like there to be a pedestrian foundation—that if one were set up, a lot more could be accomplished for pedestrians. I had a similar idea last year, only I imagined a foundation dedicated to bikeway infrastructure. Idea: If we manage to establish a foundation in the Twin Cities, perhaps dedicated to pedestrian, bikeway, and railway infrastructure, then we can use the funds collected to leverage more dollars (and more political will). If you are interested in pursuing this idea, please call me at 333-3249. Thanks!

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at sidewalk level, thus eliminating the need for elevated LRT passenger platforms. The JLA believes that increased viability of low floor cars could have a significant impact on the nature of the Central Corridor debate.

"We have been very pleased with the quality of input from the public and other government bodies, and we are going to examine that input thoroughly in order to make a sound and informed decision for the metropolitan area and the state," MnDOT Commissioner James Denn said. "The on-going efforts by the city of Minneapolis, its southern suburbs, Hennepin County and MnDOT to reach agreement on proposed highway improvements and construction of LRT in the 35W corridor are also of particular interest to me in evaluating proposals for the Central Corridor."

The JLA has been considering a number of transit alternatives for the Central Corridor, including: an LRT line between downtown Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota and downtown St. Paul; management improvements and service expansion for the metropolitan bus system; exclusive busway lanes between the two downtowns; and a "no-build" alternative that would simply continue pursuing the region's existing five year transit plan.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement outlining the alternatives being considered was completed late last year and was the subject of public hearings held January 25 and 27. The public comment period ended February 18.

Press Release from the Joint Lead Agencies, April 7, 1994.

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If you are interested in organizing around pedestrian concerns, please call Christina Hakala at 333-3249.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

If you wish to comment on this or previous newsletters, or want to submit articles for future publication, contact us at the office. If you would like to join our newsletter committee, come to our next meeting: Tuesday, June 8th (call the office first).

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AND PUBLIC POLICY

Ronald Mead

If the experts all agree, it doesn't necessarily follow that the converse is true. — Bertrand Russell.

More and more, we are relying on “the experts” to make the policy decisions that will determine the kind of city and the kind of world we will leave to our children. What we need are creative solutions to complex issues that involve every aspect of our neighborhoods, our city, our region, and our lives. If we need creative solutions, the last group we should expect to help are career bureaucrats whose only experience is highway engineering.

An engineer may be able to find a creative design for a freeway interchange, but a highway engineer will never creatively question the need for the interchange, or for the freeway itself. Portions of I-394, when viewed as an abstract art form, are marvelous. It has won awards from other highway designers.

But as public policy, 394 is a disaster. It is a spectacular implementation of a dreadful policy. Why did it happen? Because we allowed the “transportation experts” (in Minnesota, that means the highway builders) to determine the policy. The result was bad social policy, bad urban planning and, since the congestion problem they set out to solve is worse than ever, bad engineering.

No matter what the issue, the public has more understanding and more expertise than **any** group of public officials and bureaucrats that the world has ever known. Collectively,

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WHAT THEY WANT US TO BELIEVE — PART 1

Highway improvements are needed for Public Safety.

The highway developer's manual must say, "If all other arguments fail, highway expansion should always be justified by **improved safety**." No one can be opposed to improved safety. The chief accident investigator for the highway patrol has been quoted as saying, "If all the roads and vehicles were perfect, we would still have 95% of the accidents."

If safety really were the issue, the highway department would be advocating for reduced speed limits in dangerous areas, for enforcement of the existing speed limits, for improved driver education, for tougher drunk driving laws, and for functional alternatives to the automobile.

If safety really were the issue, they would be concentrating our scarce resources on the most dangerous roads rather than the relatively safe urban freeways.

The one and only solution that the Highway Department ever proposes as the remedy to all the safety problems they see is to build bigger highways to accommodate more and faster moving automobile traffic.

One hundred and nine people, on average, were killed every day in the United States in 1993 by automobiles. How many people were killed by all other forms of travel?

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WHAT THEY WANT US TO BELIEVE — PART 2

Light Rail Transit requires as much space as a four-lane highway.

This is an apples and monkeys comparison. MnDOT's drawings do in fact show LRT taking 48 feet, which is the width of four 12-foot highway lanes. This is comparing the **maximum** that LRT could ever use to the **minimum** that four traffic lanes must always have.



An LRT car is about 10 feet wide; to have a train going in each direction takes 20 feet. There needs to be some clearance between the cars but, since they are on fixed rails, a couple feet is plenty. That makes the outside to make everyone comfortable, the total a foot not 48.

A four-lane highway, on the other hand, is a very different story. Take the Crosstown as an example, or 35W south of Crosstown. They each have two traffic lanes in each direction, that makes the 48 feet everyone talks about. With narrow inside shoulders, maybe 6 feet each, and a buffer between opposing traffic lanes, that's maybe 20 feet, we are up to 80 feet. Add modest 10-foot outside shoulders and clear zones of at least 20 feet for the people who can't keep their cars on the road, and the total is something like 140 feet, not 48.

Twenty-six feet versus **one hundred and forty** feet: is this a fair comparison? After all, we haven't allowed space for the LRT stations. Well, we haven't allowed space for entrance and exit ramps, rest stops, parking lots, toll booths and gas stations either. Why should we be the only ones who tell the whole story?



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