

CITIES, CARS AND CONVERSATION

by Ron Mead

The local media, for the last few years, has given us enough reasons not to be in the city, so why do so many of us persist in living here? The most common answers are things like 'diversity,' 'cultural opportunities,' and 'proximity to jobs, recreation, etc.'

Sociologists agree: "Cities were invented to facilitate exchange of information, friendship, material goods, culture, knowledge, insight, skills, and also the exchange of emotional, psychological and spiritual support."¹ Obviously, living near jobs, shops, museums, parks, theaters, relatives, churches, friends and everything else the city has to offer is valuable.

Yet as we go about the business of living, the informal exchanges we have with others we encounter going about their daily business have more influence on us than does the latest exhibit at the Walker. Some of our most rewarding exchanges happen at the meat counter, leaning on a snow shovel, or waiting for a bus.

Once we are barricaded inside our cars, we are isolated and alienated; we have rid ourselves of any possibility of useful exchange. Once barricaded in, we no longer view those around us as fellow human beings; they are obstacles to be gotten around, impeding our progress toward home or work, robbing us of opportunities for meaningful exchanges. The automobile promised us freedom but made us prisoners and stole our world.

The car has invaded our living space. In a study in San Francisco,² resi-

dents on three streets with similar houses and histories but different traffic patterns were asked to define their 'home territory.' Residents of the 'quiet' street included the entire length of both sides of the street as well as the street itself as 'home territory.' Kids played in the street and people walked to the store. Exchanges with neighbors were an important but commonplace occurrence on the block.

Residents on a street with moderate traffic had conceded the street to the cars and indicated fewer acquaintances and friends even on their own side of the block. There were fewer children, and residents were more apt to drive to a larger store further away. The space available for exchanges with neighbors had been reduced to the sidewalks and front yards and that territory was less used than on the quiet street.

Residents on the busy street had lost everything: the street, the boulevards, the sidewalks, the front yards, the front steps and, in many cases, the front windows. They had conceded the neighborhood. Very few families remained and the neighborhood stores were gone. There was no space left for exchanges. The street was viewed as hostile, to be used only by cars.

The more space cars are allowed, the more they consume. Fast moving traffic physically requires more space than slower moving traffic to handle the same volume of cars. And the more devastating effect is the "zone of influence" controlled by cars increases further and further beyond the physical requirements as volume and speed increase.

As we work to revitalize our neighborhoods, we must recognize that cars are useful tools but aren't so sacred that we should sacrifice everything to them. We can reclaim our cities and enjoy better living with less traffic. Mobility is not freedom, and it is not too late for the Twin Cities.

¹Engwicht, David. *Reclaiming our cities and towns: better living with less traffic*. New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, 1993.

²Appleyard, Donald. *Livable Streets*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981.

LOCAL BICYCLING INITIATIVES PROCEED WITH CITY AND COUNTY SUPPORT

by Christina Hakala

In Minneapolis, every Friday is now **Ride Your Bike Day**. The Minneapolis Bicycle Advisory Committee approved a motion on February 2, 1994 to make Friday an official day for bicycling. Friday was chosen in the spirit of the tradition of dressing casually for work on Fridays. This is an opportunity for everyone who is not currently riding a bicycle to ride on a regular basis, and for those who already do to find support in numbers. Watch for updates on events around this day. If you would like to organize neighborhood rides to Downtown, or think of ideas to promote bicycling, please call Shean Bjoralt at 871-9136.

Saturday, April 16th, there will be another clean-up event for the **Midtown Greenway Corridor**. It's great exercise (I helped last year) and the County provides hot cider, coffee, and pastries, as well as sturdy gloves. Last October we removed a large amount of debris from the Corridor. We inched our way forward, like archaeologists on a dig. The hillside we cleared became a beautiful green, while ahead there lay a vast amount of trash. It was incredible to be in the middle of Minneapolis, not far from major streets, breathing fresh air in what seemed to be this vast, rustic canyon. There are miles of trash yet that need to be removed before the Corridor can be developed for fast, safe, and pleasant bicycle travel, as well as for other uses, including passenger rail. If you want to participate in cleaning up debris along the Midtown Greenway Corridor, with the assistance of Hennepin County and others, the clean-up starts at 9 a.m. (the day after tax day) with coffee and rolls. The cleaning up will begin at 10 a.m., and all are welcome any time through 1 p.m.



Last year's Midtown Greenway Corridor clean-up event.

April 16 Corridor Clean-up

MEETING LOCATIONS ARE:

- * Soo Line Garden (29th & Garfield)
- * Bennett Lumber (28th & Emerson)
- * 29th Street & Fifth Avenue

For more information on the clean-up call Patty Susick at 348-8280.

LEGAL ACTIONS CONTINUE

Scott Carlson, Legal Council, Rasmussen & Assoc.

The Neighborhood Transportation Network filed its appeal of Judge Richard Kyle's decision to allow the Third Lane Project to proceed ahead of the final Environmental Impact Statement of January 14, 1994. NTN is asking the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals to overturn the district court's denial of NTN's application for a preliminary injunction, arguing that the lower court made errors of law when it concluded that the Third Lane Project was an independent highway project separate from the I-35W Reconstruction Project.

The Eighth Circuit has ordered that NTN's original brief be filed on Monday, March 14, 1994. Concurrent with NTN's brief, the City of Minneapolis will file an amicus curiae brief, or "friend of the court," in support of NTN's position. MnDOT and the U.S. DOT will file their responsive briefs on April 13, 1994. NTN will have the opportunity to file a reply brief on April 27, 1994. The Metropolitan Council was dismissed from the lawsuit by Judge Kyle and will not be participating in the appeal. A decision is expected sometime during the summer of 1994.

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NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

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NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSPORTATION NETWORK CASE STATEMENT The Problem

The Neighborhood Transportation Network (NTN) is a grass roots, neighborhood-based organization striving to bring social justice and environmental responsibility to the provision of transportation facilities in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Founded in 1988, NTN's focus has been the State of Minnesota's proposed \$1 billion expansion of Interstate 35W, which is already the largest highway in the State. Our greater concern is the implementation of a rational, integrated public transportation system in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

During the 1980's the Twin Cities became the nation's largest metropolitan area with no rail or electric transport, the largest region totally dependent on streets and highways for meeting all of its surface transportation needs. Continued highway expansion will increase our dependence on cars at the expense of each and every one of us, but most heavily the inner-city, the environment, and the people who depend upon public transportation.

Achieving better public transportation in 35W will preserve homes, protect the environment, and help secure the region's economic future. It will empower people who cannot afford cars or who are not physically able to drive. It will open up employment, education, and other opportunities for disadvantaged persons by giving them access to locations that now can be reached only by cars. We *can* change the transportation paradigm for the metropolitan area by building better public transportation in 35W. By contrast, continuing with the region's business-as-usual, all-highway approach would mean lost opportunities for the entire region for generations to come.

The original construction of 35W had dramatic effects on the region's development. While the freeway brought economic development to the suburbs, it left the City to cope with the effects of decreased property values, disrupted neighborhoods, and increased pollution. At the same time, funding for public transportation dropped considerably, immobilizing the poor

and helping to create the vicious cycle of increased car dependence in which we find ourselves today.

The transportation system affects people's daily lives and forms the skeleton around which the region develops. Now being redesigned for the year 2010, 35W presents a unique opportunity to demonstrate that a new, forward-thinking approach to urban development will work in Minnesota, as it has in other metropolitan areas, and will improve the region's quality of life and economic future.

NTN has adopted the following transportation policy statement: No additional highway lanes of any type should be added to the Twin Cities metropolitan area's access highway system. Any additional or expanded transportation facilities provided in the region:

- * must be exclusively as public transportation available to all people, without the need for privately-owned vehicles;
- * must preserve the integrity, livability and aesthetic values of adjacent neighborhoods; and
- * must be compatible with the unique social and economic environments of adjacent neighborhoods, particularly for sensitive uses such as housing, schools, churches and parks.

Programs

NTN is working to change the transportation paradigm in the metropolitan area. Through citizen involvement, we work to influence the reconstruction of 35W so that its "expansion" will provide only additional public and non-motorized transportation that will alleviate congestion, make it possible for more people to travel where they need to go, and foster environmentally-responsible travel.

Through public education, we encourage the traveling public to decrease automobile use,

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, Mar. 29th (call the office first).

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ISTEA AND CLEAN AIR ACT

"As we approach the 21st century, the transportation community is confronted by challenges as never before. Our mobility, which is essential to the Nation's economic and social well-being, is threatened by gridlock and the absence or inadequate condition of needed facilities. At the same time, legitimate environmental concerns about the impact of transportation improvements have made the already complicated task even more difficult."

conserve energy, and reduce air pollution by taking advantage of public and non-motorized transportation. The involvement of literally thousands of private citizens will make the difference for transportation in the Twin Cities.

In economic terms, we intend to influence consumer demand and increase the supply of non-motorized public transportation in the Twin Cities market.

The following are some of our major accomplishments to date:

- * In 1991, we supported the successful efforts of the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) to achieve new direction in federal legislation. When STPP asked us to send letters to Congress, we asked "How many?" and sent them.
- * In 1992, by promoting grass-roots testimony, NTN made the one-and-only public hearing on 35W the largest hearing ever held on a transportation project in Minnesota. We also made certain that special public transportation was available and arranged rides for folks who needed them. Over 3,500 people showed up. The event, which lasted until 3:00 a.m., proved to be a rally for public transportation.
- * We have brought major environmental groups into the 35W debate, including the Sierra Club Northstar Chapter and the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy.
- * In 1993, NTN took legal action to prevent the highway proponents from starting an illegal, premature expansion of 35W.

In 1994 we intend to expand our base of grass roots support and to increase our outreach to the corporate and non-profit communities. NTN is developing an environmental defense fund as further legal action seems likely. We plan to continue our public education efforts and to lead this region in healthful new directions.

Our programs include:

- * Bi-Monthly Newsletter
- * Participation in Neighborhood and Community Events
- * Public Speaking and Presentations to

"This dual challenge is illustrated by the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA) and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). ... Because emissions from motor vehicles contribute to air pollution, transportation officials must make a commitment to programs and projects that will help achieve national air quality goals. Although the CAAA is vitally important, it did not provide significant funding to carry these programs and projects."

Neighborhood Organizations and Civic Groups

- * A Transportation Issues Conference
- * A Citizen's Guide to 35W
- * Ongoing public policy advocacy at the city, county, state, and federal levels

Supporters

Our supporters are private citizens and organizations who are interested in:

- * Preserving and improving inner-city neighborhoods and building a stronger sense of community
- * Managing the growth and development of the seven-county metro area
- * Providing public transportation options for residents, commuters, and visitors
- * Preserving our precious natural resources, wetlands, air and water quality
- * Reducing the real economic costs of automobile dependence
- * Changing the transportation paradigm nationwide, region by region

Individuals, corporations, foundations, churches, neighborhood and community groups—all of us have a stake in what happens with 35W and public transportation in the Metropolitan Area.

Rationale

NTN is working to change the way people think about transportation in Minnesota. From the individuals who need transportation to the officials who make the decisions about what kinds of transportation will be available, NTN has accepted the challenge of creating a major paradigm shift. We can't do it alone. We need the support and influence of the corporate and philanthropic communities as well as private citizens to change the paradigm.

Benefits

What benefit can accrue to the contributor? NTN's supporters enjoy the immediate benefits of making a contribution toward improving the quality of life in the Twin Cities. At a time when the problems of the inner-city are growing, few programs have offered long-term solutions. NTN's sponsors know they are supporting a systemic change, the

"That's where the ISTEA comes in. State and local officials now have an unprecedented range of choices for meeting their transportation needs. ... The ISTEA complements the CAAA by providing funding and the flexibility to use it in ways that will help us improve air quality through the development of a balanced, environmentally sound, intermodal transportation program."¹

¹ *Air Quality Programs and Provisions of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991*, U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, No. FHWA-PD-92-022

effects of which will last for generations to come.

NTN's overall objective is to improve an intrinsic part of our infrastructure which will benefit every citizen over the long term. Cities require the development of sound, rational structures that will promote unified communities which encourage personal growth and freedom. An integrated public transportation system is a necessary investment.

"No doubt we need a broader vision than we have had in what has passed for infrastructure planning in the past. Roads and other infrastructure powerfully influence the patterns of physical and spacial development on the national landscape, literally setting choices in concrete and restricting the options of later generations. Choices should be made carefully."¹

The United States now invests less in infrastructure, measured as a percentage of gross domestic product, than any other industrialized country.² The Twin Cities are no exception to the national trend. In fact, infrastructure expenditures on public transportation have been virtually non-existent when compared to infrastructure expenditures on automotive travel.

Contributors to NTN make an investment in the future—with a significant return in the form of a cleaner environment, renewed opportunities for economic development, increased options for both employers and employees, energy conservation and a more just social structure.

None of the benefits of an integrated transportation system will occur unless we are able to create a change in this region's travel behavior and expectations—the transportation paradigm. NTN seeks the help of private citizens, organizations, corporations and foundations to make that change happen. NTN needs volunteers and financial sponsors to invest in the long-term health of our communities, making the Twin Cities metropolitan area more livable now and in the future.

¹ Seely, Bruce, "A Republic Bound Together," *Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 1993.

² *Ibid.*

SAFETY CHANGES PLANNED FOR 121/62 INTERCHANGE

by Claire Olson

The Minnesota Department of Transportation is proceeding with plans for modifications characterized as safety improvements to the Highway 121 and 62-Crosstown interchange, which MnDOT calls "suicide curve". With contracts having been let and work scheduled to begin in April, this project will move the interchange loop and add a third lane between Highway 121 and the Penn Avenue exit. Estimates of precise construction plans are confusing and have varied widely. It appears that the construction will bring 121 about 12 feet closer to the southeast corner of Grass Lake and the homes between that point and Penn Avenue.

The project is rated a safety improvement, with no additional property required, and is held to be exempt from environmental and other approval processes; it will be undertaken with funds currently available to MnDOT. This stretch of highway has one of the highest accident ratios in the state, and there has not been dispute on the safety need for the project.

MnDOT considered several approaches, which were rejected for safety and other reasons; however, the plan selected is considered by some to be the most intrusive, as well as the most costly. An alternative favored by 11th Ward Council Member Doré Mead (well known to the Neighborhood Transportation Network) would have solved the safety problems with traffic lights and rumble strips in the most high-risk sections of the interchange.

MnDOT maintains that this project is a temporary improvement, and not part of any overall design for 35W.

Since MnDOT already owns the easement, the project will not require the taking of any additional land. Even so, the project will be invasive of a small section of Southwest Minneapolis, bringing the highway closer to the path around Grass Lake and to the homes adjacent to the current Penn Avenue exit ramp, putting at risk existing

