

**Date:** June 3, 2024

**To:** Council Member Robin Wonsley, Minneapolis City Council  
Council Member Jamal Osman, Minneapolis City Council  
Hwa Jeong Kim, Vice President, Saint Paul City Council  
Representative Samantha Sencer-Mura, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Athena Hollins, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Esther Agbaje, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Senator Omar Fateh, Minnesota State Senate  
Angela Conley, Commissioner, Hennepin County

**From:** Khani Sahebjam, P.E., Metro District Engineer, Minnesota Department of Transportation

Thank you for your letter of May 7, 2024, outlining your concerns about the Rethinking I-94 evaluation process. The Minnesota Department of Transportation's Metro District started this work in 2016, and we agree the project is a generational opportunity to build a multimodal transportation corridor that effectively moves people and goods and provides a high quality of life for neighboring communities. As you state, health and well being of corridor residents is a high priority.

MnDOT follows the National Environmental Policy Act and Minnesota Environmental Policy Act, both of which have established required guidance MnDOT must follow in project development and evaluation. Your comments will be recorded and considered as part of our Environmental Review.

Below are our responses to the concerns and recommended actions noted in your letter. If you have further questions and/or concerns, please reach out to Melissa Barnes, Rethinking I-94 Project Director, [melissa.barnes@state.mn.us](mailto:melissa.barnes@state.mn.us), to schedule a follow-up meeting with us to discuss them in more detail. I believe some of the nuances of highly technical information are better explained in person.

## **Concerns and Recommendations**

### ***Traffic and transit modeling***

MnDOT, the Metropolitan Council and the Federal Highway Administration use established practices for traffic modeling and forecasting when planning transportation improvements in the Twin Cities. These accepted and recognized practices incorporate each city's comprehensive plans and consider various modes of travel and types of trips being taken.

### ***Project limits***

MnDOT has committed to working with the Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul to consider the area to the west and east of the current I-94 project. In addition, MnDOT and the City of Saint Paul have laid out a framework of how I-94 east of the project area could be studied in the future. MnDOT and the City of Minneapolis have begun the same discussions.

If it is determined that additional areas need to be brought into Rethinking I-94 as the process advances, they will be. Rethinking I-94 will incorporate connections to the downtowns, as appropriate.

### ***Community engagement***

MnDOT has led a robust public engagement process to solicit input and feedback from communities along I-94. Rethinking I-94 was based on our commitment to better engage with communities, businesses and residents along I-94 so their interests and concerns could be reflected in potential improvements. MnDOT spent two years before starting the environmental process in meetings and engaging people in communities along I-94 to understand their ideas and concerns. That input is reflected in the purpose and need statement and statement of goals for the project.

As the Rethinking I-94 project process continues, more detailed concepts will be defined as additional information is gathered. MnDOT will continue tracking community feedback through surveys, community events, neighborhood pop-up events, public meetings and other engagement activities. Project staff welcome your attendance and participation at engagement events in your neighborhoods as well. These engagement tools and activities will take place as alternatives are further developed and refined. MnDOT is committed to ongoing and robust engagement with those who could be most impacted by the project.

### ***Anti-displacement and community development***

The Rethinking I-94 project will evaluate the potential of displacement of individuals, and look at the economic impacts, including potential gentrification. If displacement or gentrification are identified as impacts through the environmental review process, MnDOT will work to address these issues in collaboration with our project partners.

### ***Evaluation criteria***

The evaluation criteria were developed in collaboration with agencies and updated based on community feedback. The project's purpose and need serves as the foundation for the evaluation criteria. Alternatives are eliminated if they fail to address the project's purpose and need, consistent with state and federal policy. For example, the National Environmental Policy Act best practices require evaluating alternatives based on their ability to address the transportation purpose and need.

The project team further considers alternatives based on their impacts to social, economic and environmental (SEE) resources. Alternatives in this scoping phase that meet the purpose and need, minimize SEE impacts, and perform favorably in terms of goals, livability and other, additional considerations will move into the Tier 1 EIS for further review and consideration. The Tier 1 EIS will use the identified criteria and measures to evaluate the remaining alternatives in greater detail.

### ***Freeway to at-grade conversion***

I-94 is an important transportation corridor for the region. I-94 in the area being reviewed by Rethinking I-94 presents unique challenges in its length and traffic volume, as well as its location in the middle of a freeway serving two downtowns. The number of lanes proposed in scoping for the alternatives are necessary for transit and motor vehicle mobility. Alternatives that progress into the Tier 1 will be further evaluated for how the number of lanes may change along the corridor. The locations of interchanges and/or intersections will be determined as part of the next steps of scoping.

MnDOT and its project partners have studied at-grade conversions or highway removals across the country and the world, as noted in the Freeway Removal Memo presented to the PAC at the February 14, 2024, meeting. MnDOT and the Federal Highway Administration have been meeting and will continue to meet with multiple departments of transportation from other states to discuss highway removal projects and compare similarities and differences to I-94. Project staff will share more information about this topic at the next PAC meeting.

Thank you for your active participation in this important project. Again, please consider scheduling a follow up meeting with Melissa Barnes and me if you are interested in discussing your concerns and recommendations in greater detail.

cc: Mayor Jacob Frey, City of Minneapolis  
Mayor Melvin Carter, City of Saint Paul  
Council Member Anika Bowie, Saint Paul City Council  
Council Member Mitra Jalali, Saint Paul City Council  
Kevin Anderson, Commissioner, Hennepin County  
Council Member W. Toni Carter, Metropolitan Council  
Chair Charlie Zelle, Metropolitan Council  
Senator Bobby Joe Champion, Minnesota Senate  
Senator Kari Dziedzic, Minnesota Senate  
Senator D. Scott Dibble, Minnesota Senate  
Senator Zaynab Mohamed, Minnesota Senate  
Senator Erin Murphy, Minnesota Senate  
Senator Sandra Pappas, Minnesota Senate  
Senator Clare Oumou Verbeten, Minnesota Senate  
Representative Mohamud Noor, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Frank Hornstein, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Aisha Gomez, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Hodan Hassan, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Kaohly Her, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Samakab Hussein, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Maria Isa Perez-Vega, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Representative Leigh Finke, Minnesota House of Representatives  
Rena Moran, Commissioner, Ramsey County  
Mai Chong, Commissioner, Ramsey County  
Trista Matascastillo, Commissioner, Ramsey County  
Nancy Daubenberger, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Melissa Barnes, Rethinking I-94 Project Director, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Sheila Kauppi, Metro District Deputy Engineer, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Wendall Meyer, Division Administrator, Minnesota Division, Federal Highway Administration  
Anna Varney, Major Projects Engineer, Federal Highway Administration