

Smart INVESTMENTSSM

IN TRANSPORTATION FOR MINNESOTA



**Goals and Targets to Spur
Growth and Expand Prosperity**



GROWTH & JUSTICE

SMART INVESTMENTSSM IN TRANSPORTATION FOR MINNESOTA: Goals and Targets to Spur Growth and Expand Prosperity

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Growth & Justice is a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that researches and recommends public policies to make Minnesota's economy simultaneously more prosperous and fair. We support fair taxation and smart public sector investment — fiscally responsible, accountable investment that advances prosperity for all Minnesotans. Growth & Justice is a leading progressive voice on key public policy issues in the state.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2** Executive Summary
- 5** Transportation Matters
- 8** Goal: Improve travel time and efficiency for freight
- 11** Goal: Better connect low-income Minnesotans to jobs and other important destinations
- 14** Goal: Improve travel and travel choices for Minnesotans
- 18** Goal: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation
- 21** Moving Forward
- 22** Acknowledgements

Transportation affects the economic outlook for Minnesota and both the economic well-being and quality of life for the state's workers and residents. Economic growth and development are influenced and shaped by smart, cost-effective public-sector investments in the transportation system. Minnesota businesses use the state's transportation system to connect to workers, suppliers and customers and to link to the larger economies of the nation and the world. For the people of Minnesota, a well-designed, quality transportation system provides routes to jobs and other key destinations – especially important for Minnesotans with low incomes.

Minnesota needs a transportation system that is efficient, accessible, cost-effective and reliable. Facing challenges on those fronts, we can't just do more of the same. To minimize transportation infrastructure costs, the state and its communities must maintain and maximize the use of what already exists. Certainly construction is needed to preserve critical infrastructure and for high-benefit transportation improvements, especially those yielding positive impacts on the broader transportation system at relatively low costs. But importantly Minnesota's public sector must pursue smart and innovative strategies to increase the efficiency of existing roadways, boost transit use, spur more travel on bike and foot, change land-use patterns, and otherwise lower the demand for limited space on crowded highways.

With guidance from leaders and experts across the state, Growth & Justice engaged in a multi-year initiative about *Smart InvestmentsSM in Transportation for Minnesota*, using evidence and analysis to identify options that can spur economic growth, expand prosperity and improve our quality of life. Four major goals emerge for what should be accomplished:

- ▶ Improve travel time and efficiency for freight.
- ▶ Better connect low-income Minnesotans to jobs and other important destinations.
- ▶ Improve travel and travel choices for Minnesotans.
- ▶ Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

Growth & Justice has issued a series of policy briefs and reports (available at: www.growthandjustice.org/tr) that lay out key challenges and identify specific investments, policies and approaches worth doing for transportation in Minnesota. This report – the final one in the series – explains the overarching goals, presents related measures for progress, and identifies target areas for action. ([More](#))

GOAL: IMPROVE TRAVEL TIME AND EFFICIENCY FOR FREIGHT

Measure: Costs of freight per ton mile in Minnesota fall below the national benchmark for freight movement by truck, rail and water.

A well-functioning freight transportation system is essential for a strong, growing state economy. For the movement of goods and commodities, Minnesota faces challenges from an aging transportation infrastructure, upward trends in freight quantities, and larger freight vehicles. ([More](#))

TARGET AREAS FOR FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION IN MINNESOTA:

INTERREGIONAL CORRIDORS – This system of almost 3,000 miles of priority corridors outside the Twin Cities area carries most of the state's freight traffic. ([More](#))

TWIN CITIES TRAFFIC CONGESTION – Twin Cities traffic congestion reduces productivity and significantly increases the cost of freight operations. ([More](#))

INTERMODAL FREIGHT MOVEMENT – Freight in Minnesota is often carried on different modes for different parts of the journey, and transfers from mode to mode require intermodal facilities, including cargo container operations, elevators, terminals and vehicle ramps. ([More](#))

TRUCK WEIGHTS, ROADS AND BRIDGES – Minnesota may need to explore targeted approaches to upgrading the transportation infrastructure for heavy trucks while at the same time considering increased fees for freight haulers and new regulations for axles, suspension equipment and brakes to reduce or eliminate the adverse impacts of the heavy loads. ([More](#))

> FURTHER READING:

For more about freight transportation, download the policy brief at:

www.growthandjustice.org/freight_brief

and report at:

www.growthandjustice.org/freight.

GOAL: BETTER CONNECT LOW-INCOME MINNESOTANS TO JOBS AND OTHER IMPORTANT DESTINATIONS

Measure: An increasing share of Minnesota’s low-income households hit the affordability range for transportation and housing costs, with the combined total below 45 percent of income.

Transportation improvements aimed at Minnesotans with low incomes and limited transportation options can link households to jobs. Access to other important destinations – schools, colleges and health care facilities – matters, too. [\(More\)](#)

TARGET AREAS FOR BETTER CONNECTING MINNESOTANS WITH LOW INCOMES:

TRANSIT – Transportation is a major barrier to employment for low-income Minnesotans, and better transit can reduce that barrier. [\(More\)](#)

CARS – Cars are the primary mode of transportation for most Minnesotans with low incomes. For small, rural communities and outlying suburban locations, cars may be the only transportation option. [\(More\)](#)

SHARED RIDES – Shared rides are an important option, especially in more sparsely populated areas where regular transit service proves difficult to offer. [\(More\)](#)

LAND USE – Approaches that tie land use to transportation will reduce infrastructure costs and make it far easier for low-income Minnesotans – and everyone – to reach destinations via lower-cost options: transit, shared rides, biking and walking. [\(More\)](#)

> FURTHER READING:

For more about better connections, download the policy brief at: www.growthandjustice.org/BC_brief and report at: www.growthandjustice.org/BC.

GOAL: IMPROVE TRAVEL AND TRAVEL CHOICES FOR MINNESOTANS

Measures:

- > *Average travel times are below the national average, with increased attention to how we design our communities, how we use existing roadways, ways to reduce demand for travel, and a broader range of travel options.*
- > *Ratings improve for pavement conditions and transportation infrastructure on main routes throughout Minnesota’s existing transportation system.*
- > *An increasing share of travelers chooses transportation options other than solo car trips.*

To improve travel and travel choices, Minnesota and its communities must, of course, invest in roads and bridges. But beyond this, the public sector needs to find smart and innovative ways to use existing roadways more efficiently, change land-use patterns, increase transit and other alternatives to solo car travel, and otherwise lower demand for limited space on our highways. [\(More\)](#)

TARGET AREAS FOR IMPROVING TRAVEL AND TRAVEL CHOICES:

INTERREGIONAL CORRIDORS – These priority corridors are crucial for Minnesotans traveling to and from the important economic centers outside the Twin Cities. [\(More\)](#)

MANAGING AND IMPROVING THE HIGHWAY SYSTEM – Maintenance and preservation of Minnesota’s already extensive highway system must be the top priority. Beyond this, the emphasis for highways is shifting away from simply building more lane miles to instead determining how best to improve and manage existing lane miles for better system-wide performance. [\(More\)](#)

TRAVEL DEMAND MANAGEMENT – Efforts to reduce the demand for travel can ease traffic congestion, usually at a much lower cost than the supply-side action of adding lane miles. [\(More\)](#)

TRANSIT – Transit alleviates Twin Cities traffic congestion by increasing the capacity of major metro area thoroughfares, carrying more people per vehicle than cars and in less vehicle space per passenger. [\(More\)](#)

BIKING AND WALKING – These travel options reduce the number of cars on the road, helping to alleviate congestion. [\(More\)](#)

LAND USE – More compact development, and a mix of uses close by, allows people to reach destinations without driving cars for long distances and even without driving cars at all. ([More](#))

INTERCITY BUS SERVICE – Bus travel among Minnesota’s cities and beyond offers important transportation links for many Minnesotans. ([More](#))

> FURTHER READING:

For more about traffic congestion, download the policy brief at: www.growthandjustice.org/Cong_Brief and report at: www.growthandjustice.org/Congestion.

To learn more about connecting communities in Greater Minnesota, download the policy brief at: www.growthandjustice.org/GMN_Brief and the report at: www.growthandjustice.org/GreaterMN.

GOAL: REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM TRANSPORTATION

Measure: Annual vehicle miles per capita decline 20 percent or more by 2025 from the 2009 level of 10,800.

The cars and trucks we drive make travel fast and convenient, but as our vehicles burn fossil fuels, they emit greenhouse gases (GHGs) that inflict serious damage on the environment. Reducing the number of miles we drive will help us reach Minnesota’s goals for GHG emissions – and it will pay off, too, in terms of lower costs for travelers and less wear and tear on the transportation infrastructure. ([More](#))

TARGET AREAS FOR REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS THROUGH DECREASED VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED:

LAND USE AND TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT – Smart land use emphasizes more compact development in central cities and other developed areas, and less sparse development at the urban fringes. ([More](#))

TRANSIT – Increases in transit use will produce modest decreases in vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions, with greater reductions when combined with smart land use. ([More](#))

PRICING STRATEGIES – Transportation pricing policies and arrangements can reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions if they increase, in obvious ways, the expense of driving. ([More](#))

> FURTHER READING:

For more about reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, download the policy brief at: www.growthandjustice.org/GHG_Brief and report at: www.growthandjustice.org/GHG.



Transportation Matters

Transportation affects the economic outlook for Minnesota and both the economic well-being and quality of life for the state's workers and residents. Economic growth and development are influenced and shaped by smart, cost-effective public-sector investments in a transportation system that makes places accessible and allows for the efficient movement of goods and people. A well-designed, quality transportation system connects Minnesotans to jobs and other key destinations and offers strong links among Minnesota's communities and its businesses.

Surface transportation routes and modes lay the base for business activity in the state. Minnesota businesses use the state's transportation system to connect to workers, suppliers and customers and to link to the larger economies of the nation and the world. Freight movement is critical. Businesses incur significant costs from congestion delays and poor road conditions. By contrast, efficient and effective transportation options lower costs and boost productivity.

For the people of Minnesota, the transportation system is an integral part of life, shaping the if, how, when and where of our travel. Everyone benefits from easier access to places – destinations for jobs, school, health care, retail, entertainment and government services.

Access to destinations is especially important for low-income Minnesotans, who face significant transportation challenges. A 2006 study estimated that Twin Cities area households in the lowest income range spent more than half of their income on transportation and those with incomes from \$20,000 to \$35,000 spent more than one-third. Residents of Greater Minnesota, too, face high transportation costs, particularly in rural areas where people drive more. Better, affordable connections to jobs increase the economic potential and prosperity of low-income households. Smart investments in transportation infrastructure and sensible approaches to land use and community design help put Minnesota's households in a better position to benefit from economic growth.

ACTION IS NEEDED

With statewide economic growth, prosperity and quality of life all tied to transportation, Minnesota needs a transportation system that is efficient, accessible, cost-effective and reliable. The state, its cities and its counties face challenges on those fronts. Already playing catch-up after many years of insufficient investment, Minnesota has yet to adequately address many emerging transportation concerns posed by current and projected transportation needs. Both fiscal constraints and environmental concerns are forcing careful and creative thinking about smart approaches to transportation in Minnesota. We can't just do more of the same.

A range of actions is required to improve transportation in Minnesota – as recognized already by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Metropolitan Council, local governments and other lead public agencies. To minimize transportation infrastructure costs, the state and its communities must preserve and maximize the use of what already exists. Certainly construction is needed to maintain critical infrastructure and for high-benefit transportation improvements, especially those yielding positive impacts on the broader transportation system at relatively low costs. But importantly Minnesota's public sector must pursue smart and innovative strategies to use existing roadways more efficiently, boost transit use, spur more travel on bike and foot, change land-use patterns, and otherwise lower the demand for limited space on crowded highways.

GOALS FOR TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT IN MINNESOTA

Growth & Justice – a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that explores and recommends cost-effective, public-sector investments for Minnesota – recognizes surface transportation as a critical element of the infrastructure we need to keep Minnesota strong and growing. With guidance from leaders and experts across the state, Growth & Justice engaged in a multi-year initiative about *Smart InvestmentsSM in Transportation for Minnesota*, using evidence and analysis to identify options that can spur economic growth, expand prosperity and improve the quality of life for the state's people and places.

Four major goals emerge for what the state should accomplish:

- Improve travel time and efficiency for freight.
- Better connect low-income Minnesotans to jobs and other important destinations.
- Improve travel and travel choices for Minnesotans.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

Growth & Justice has issued a series of policy briefs and reports (available at: www.growthandjustice.org/tr) that lay out key challenges and identify specific investments, policies and approaches worth doing to improve transportation in Minnesota. In keeping with Growth & Justice's mission and principles, the transportation recommendations are based upon research and evidence and aimed at spurring growth and broadening prosperity. The project has emphasized accountability through measurable goals, economically progressive strategies in terms of impacts and costs, and sustainability. This report – the final one in the series – explains the overarching goals, presents related measures for progress, and identifies target areas for action.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Growth & Justice's transportation policy briefs and reports (available at: www.growthandjustice.org/tr) lay out a range of investments, policies and choices, including many low-cost and some no-cost strategies for improving transportation in the state. But funding is required for quality public-sector infrastructure and systems. Even highly cost-effective approaches to transportation generally come with costs – for technology, for the planning and implementation of land use changes, or for construction of redesigned thoroughfares, for example. Money also is needed for maintenance and upkeep of Minnesota's existing and extensive transportation infrastructure. New construction – including high-impact, low-cost projects – certainly carries a price tag.

Transportation funding in this state flows from a variety of sources, with most state-level dollars coming from Minnesota's gas tax, vehicle registration fees, and the motor vehicle sales tax. Property taxes generate much of the revenues for local spending on roads. Sources also include federal aid, transit fares, and spending by companies on such important private-sector transportation infrastructure components as rail lines and port facilities. Federal transportation dollars – generally provided as a match to state and local spending – often cover most of the costs for transportation infrastructure projects in the state.

Minnesota's governments also sell bonds and in this way borrow money for spending on transportation infrastructure. Bonding, then, is a financing mechanism, not a revenue stream. Bonds raise dollars to advance transportation infrastructure projects on a faster timeline than would be possible with a pay-as-you-go strategy.² But to the extent that the state government depends upon future transportation revenues to pay off bonds sold now, great care must be taken to ensure that the commitment of those future revenues will not leave the state short of dollars needed to address transportation upkeep and operations in the years ahead. Additional revenue – from the highway fund or from the state's general fund dollars – would increase the bonding capacity for transportation projects.

While recognizing the need for transportation funding, Growth & Justice and its steering committee for *Smart InvestmentsSM in Transportation for Minnesota* chose to focus on the challenges facing the transportation system and the smart investments, policies and choices for meeting them, rather than the specific dollar amounts required or the mechanisms used for transportation funding. Going forward, Minnesota's citizens, elected officials and transportation policy makers will need to secure sufficient funds to support the state's vital transportation infrastructure. Our advice is to raise the necessary revenue fairly, with a strong emphasis on sources that tie to ability to pay.

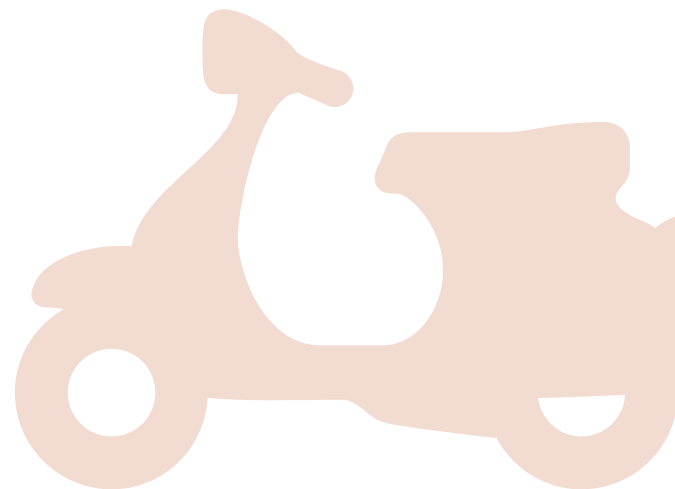
FOCUSING ON MINNESOTA'S OVERALL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

This report presents four major goals for improving and reshaping Minnesota's transportation system to boost economic growth and prosperity. The report also identifies relevant measures to track progress on those goals,³ and it lays out high-priority target areas for each of them. We present the four goals individually, but real progress on transportation for Minnesota requires a system-wide vision that connects goals, approaches and measures in ways that advance our transportation infrastructure overall. Overarching efforts to improve our transportation system should reflect the themes that emerge from this Growth & Justice initiative on *Smart InvestmentsSM in Transportation for Minnesota* – high ratios of benefits to costs, fix-it first approaches, travel choices, payoffs for business, improvements for those with low incomes and limited transportation options, and better patterns for the land use that shapes our need

to travel and the ways we do so. Minnesota GO (www.dot.state.mn.us/minnesotago), the Minnesota Department of Transportation's 2011 vision for the next 50 years, emphasizes economic competitiveness, quality of life and environmental health. It lays out important guiding principles and challenges, many of which align with the themes presented here.

ENDNOTES

1. Peter M. Hass, Carrie Makarewicz, Albert Benedict, Thomas W. Sanchez and Casey J. Dawkins, *Housing & Transportation Cost Trade-offs and Burdens of Working Households in 28 Metros*, Center for Neighborhood Technology, July 2006, p. 15, available at <http://www.cnt.org/repository/H-T-Tradeoffs-for-Working-Families-n-28-Metros-FULL.pdf>.
2. Minnesota Department of Transportation, *Minnesota Statewide Transportation Policy Plan: 2009-2028*, pp. 5-3 and 5-4. Available at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/stateplan/download.html>.
3. Growth & Justice compiled a limited list of six measures specifically tied to the four goals for *Smart InvestmentsSM in Transportation for Minnesota*. They are useful gauges for progress on transportation in the state. Performance measures are widely recognized as important to transportation, and Growth & Justice reviewed and drew from measurables used or proposed by others. Transportation measures of interest included those from the Minnesota Department of Transportation for the *Statewide Transportation Policy Plan* (<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/stateplan/Final%20Plan%20Documents/Policy%20Plan/PDF/AppendixD.pdf>); from the Metropolitan Council and listed throughout its own *Transportation Policy Plan* (<http://www.metrocouncil.org/planning/transportation/TPP/2010/index.htm>); from Transit for Livable Communities and the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy in their critique of Twin Cities transportation performance measures (<http://www.tlcminnesota.org/pdf/Transportation%20Performance%20Report%202009%20FINAL.pdf>); from the University of Minnesota's Center for Transportation Studies and its Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, presented as part of a broader project on measuring sustainable regional development (<http://www.cts.umn.edu/Publications/ResearchReports/pdfdownload.pl?id=1328>) and the Wilder Foundation's Compass project (<http://www.mncompass.org/transportation/index.php>).





GOAL:

Improve travel time and efficiency for freight

Measure: Costs of freight per ton mile in Minnesota fall below the national benchmark for freight movement by truck, rail and water.

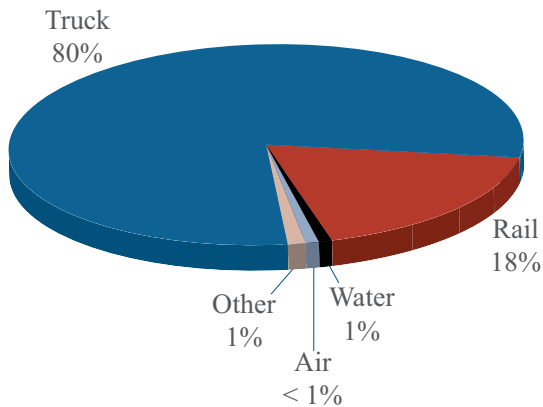
A well-functioning freight transportation system is essential for a strong, growing state economy. The transportation system allows a wide range of freight movement – from consumer goods to business equipment and parts, from home deliveries to business supplies, and from crops to iron ore. The timely and efficient movement of freight matters to the state’s large corporations, small- and medium-sized businesses, farmers, workers and consumers. Freight affects communities throughout Minnesota, from small communities in rural regions to the state’s major transportation hubs in the Twin Cities and Duluth.

For the movement of goods and commodities, Minnesota faces challenges from an aging transportation infrastructure, upward trends in freight quantities, and larger freight vehicles. Both the public and private sectors have roles to play, with government committing public funds to maintain and improve the transportation infrastructure that private businesses use when moving freight. The private sector, for its part, owns and operates significant components of that infrastructure, including rail lines and terminals, for example, and facilities for transferring goods and commodities between truck and rail.

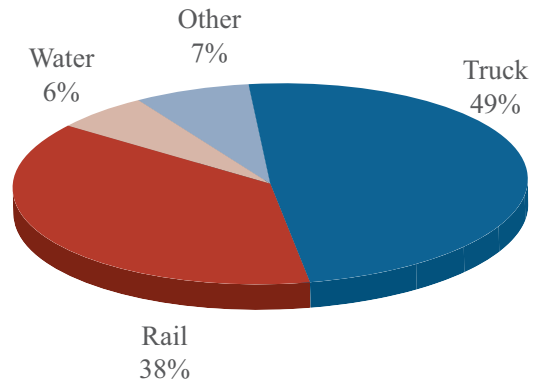
Growth & Justice identifies four important target areas for freight transportation in Minnesota: interregional corridors (IRCs), congestion, intermodal freight movement, and roadways and bridges for heavy trucks.

MINNESOTA FREIGHT, 2007

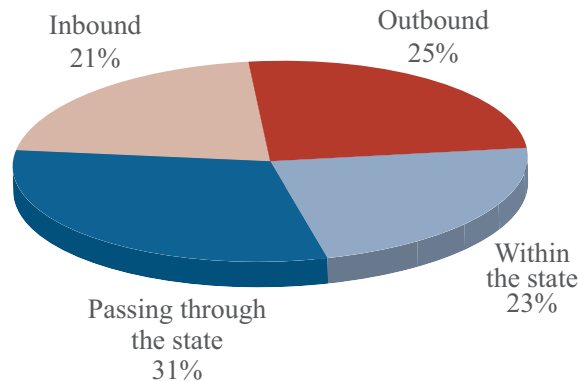
BY VALUE



BY VOLUME



MOVEMENT BY VOLUME



Source: Minnesota Department of Transportation

MINNESOTA'S INTERREGIONAL CORRIDORS

The Minnesota Department of Transportation has designated almost 3,000 miles of roadways outside the Twin Cities area as priority interregional corridors that link the state's main centers of economic activity and in this way increase the state's economic vitality. These routes connect the Twin Cities, St. Cloud, Rochester, Fargo-Moorhead, Duluth and about 50 other communities. The IRC system in Greater Minnesota forms the backbone for travel by heavy freight haulers within and through the state. As part of the broader U.S. and state trunk highway systems in Minnesota, all IRCs are 10-ton roads that can accommodate trucks at the legal limit of 80,000 pounds for gross vehicle weight. While the IRC system makes up only 2 percent of Minnesota's roadway miles, it carries the majority of the state's freight traffic.⁴ Consequently the IRC system warrants high-priority attention from the State of Minnesota.

TWIN CITIES TRAFFIC CONGESTION

While traffic congestion is manageable on most routes in Greater Minnesota, it ranks as a major concern for truckers driving in the Twin Cities region. Tighter manufacturing and distribution arrangements, reflecting the move in recent decades toward just-in-time delivery, have increased the importance of predictable and reliable freight times. Congestion reduces productivity and significantly increases the cost of freight operations through decreases in vehicle utilization, fuel efficiency and hours of productive service from drivers. The estimated cost of a congestion delay for a freight hauler is significantly higher than for a commuter in a passenger vehicle.⁵ Congestion also means more vehicles stuck idling in traffic and spewing emissions into the air.

INTERMODAL FREIGHT MOVEMENT

Freight in Minnesota moves by truck, train, ship and plane and often is carried on these different modes of transportation for different parts of the journey. Minnesota relies more heavily than most states on rail and water for freight shipments because Minnesota is a major producer of bulk commodities, including grain, other crops and iron ore. This means the transfer of freight between modes is a significant challenge and opportunity for shippers and haulers. Efficient multimodal and intermodal freight movement lowers transportation costs, increases productivity, reduces congestion, improves mobility and decreases energy consumption.⁶ For the transfer of goods and commodities, freight requires intermodal facilities, including cargo container operations, elevators, terminals and vehicle ramps.⁷ Although shippers increasingly move freight in secured containers that can be transferred between modes without the need to unpack and repack, Minnesota has few facilities and only limited capacity to handle containerized freight.

TRUCK WEIGHTS, ROADS AND BRIDGES

When it comes to weight restrictions on freight haulers, the trend in recent years has been more weight and fewer restrictions. Federal law limits truck weights on interstate highways, and states set limits for other roadways, including most of Minnesota's trunk highway system. Allowable truck weights depend in large part on the strength of the road-and-bridge infrastructure that bears the load. Heavy trucks shorten the life span of bridges, while trucks with heavy axle loads damage roads. The wear and tear on pavement from one fully loaded large commercial truck is estimated to be thousands of times the wear and tear caused by an automobile.⁸ But truck weight limits have an impact on Minnesota's economic competitiveness because freight movement matters to many sectors of the economy. Compared to Minnesota, most neighboring states and all Canadian provinces allow heavier truck weights, larger combinations of freight trailers, or both. In the coming years, Minnesota may need to explore targeted approaches to upgrading the transportation infrastructure for heavy trucks while at the same time considering increased fees on freight haulers and new regulations for axles, suspension equipment and brakes to reduce or eliminate the adverse impacts of the heavy loads. Worth considering, too, that increased truck weights reduce trucking costs, which can lead to the diversion of freight to more trucks and away from rail — a safer and more environmentally sound mode.

> FURTHER READING:

For more about freight transportation, including proposed investments, policies and choices, download the policy brief at: www.growthandjustice.org/freight_brief and report at: www.growthandjustice.org/freight.

ENDNOTES

4. Minnesota Department of Transportation, *Minnesota Statewide Transportation Policy Plan*, p. 3-8.
5. T.H. Maze, Dennis Kroeger, and Mark Berndt, Trucks and Twin Cities Traffic Management, Minnesota Department of Transportation, June 2005, pp. 16-17. Available at http://www.intrans.iastate.edu/reports/twin_trucks.pdf.
6. Minnesota Department of Transportation, *Minnesota Statewide Transportation Policy Plan*, p. 3-8.
7. Minnesota Department of Transportation, *Minnesota Statewide Freight Plan*, May 2005, p. 2-14. Available at http://www.dot.state.mn.us/ofrw/PDF/MN_SFP_Final_Report_05.pdf.
8. David Christianson, Mn/DOT's manager of freight planning and development, email correspondence, November 11, 2009.





GOAL:

Better connect low-income Minnesotans to jobs and other important destinations

Measure: An increasing share of Minnesota's low-income households hit the affordability range for transportation and housing costs, with the combined total below 45 percent of income.

Better connections are especially important for low-income Minnesotans, who face significant transportation challenges. Just less than half of Minnesota's poor live in the Twin Cities urbanized area, with more than half living in the rest of the state.⁹ All too often, low-income travelers throughout Minnesota face problematic choices when it comes to transportation. They either take on the high price and financial burden of car ownership or depend upon transit service, which is often poor in terms of what locations can be reached and how fast, at least outside heavily traveled corridors in metro areas.¹⁰ For Minnesotans in some rural areas, public transit is not available at all.

Transportation improvements aimed at Minnesotans with low incomes and limited transportation options can yield very significant benefits. They can link households to jobs and in this way to economic stability and prosperity. Access to other important destinations matters, too, with schools, colleges and health care facilities as standout targets important to many Minnesotans who face transportation challenges.

Growth & Justice identifies four important target areas for better connecting Minnesotans with low incomes to jobs and other destinations: transit, cars, shared rides and land use.

TRANSIT

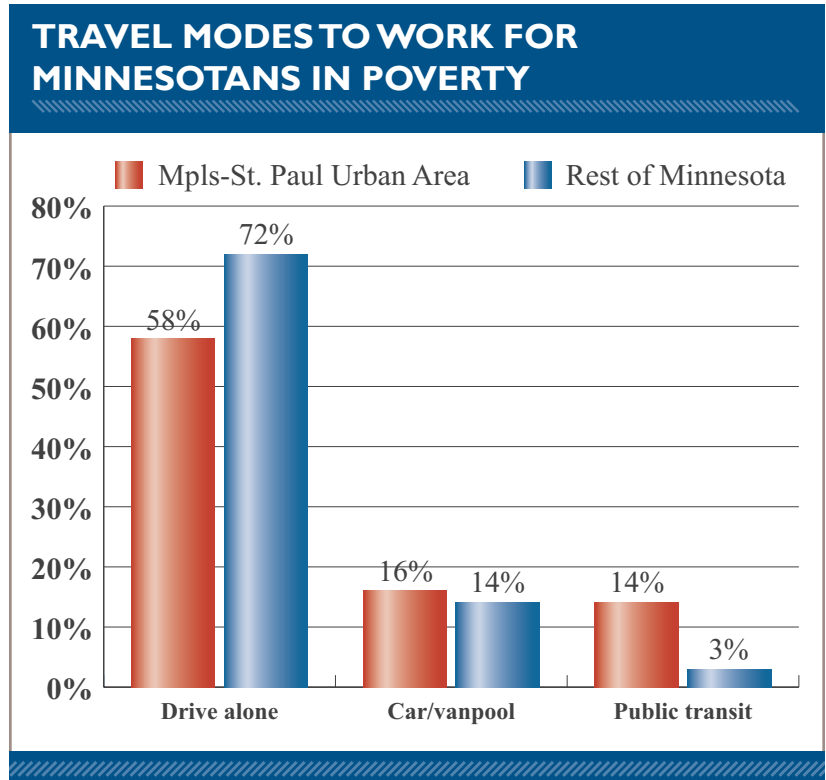
The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Transit Administration identifies affordable mobility as “the most fundamental reason for offering transit service.”¹¹ Households that use transit can avoid the very high costs of owning and operating a car or a second car. Not surprisingly then, low- and moderate-income Minnesotans depend more on public transit than do higher-income residents. Transportation is a major barrier to employment for Minnesotans with low incomes, and better transit can reduce that barrier. To make transit an option for low-income workers, better transit service is needed from areas with concentrations of low-income residents to concentrations of jobs. Transit in Greater Minnesota – where outside the larger communities transit often depends on dial-a-ride service and other alternatives to fixed-route bus service – transit should focus first and foremost on serving people who face the greatest transportation challenges: low-income residents, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

CARS

With federal, state and local transportation policy focused for more than a half century on car travel, cars remain an important element of the transportation equation for low-income Minnesotans traveling to jobs and other important destinations. At present, cars are the primary mode of transportation for most Minnesotans with low incomes. By using cars rather than transit, people are better able to work jobs with irregular hours or take shifts during off-peak hours in evenings and on weekends when transit service slows. For small, rural communities and outlying suburban locations, cars may be the only transportation option. At the same time, cars put significant strains on household budgets, with most low-income households owning older cars that often require extensive repairs and higher maintenance costs while offering less reliability than newer models.¹² Increased options within the transportation system – transit, rideshare arrangements, car-sharing programs and bike routes, for example – greatly benefit people with low incomes and limited transportation choices.

SHARED RIDES

Transportation policy often focuses on cars and transit, but when it comes to work trips, shared rides are a key option for Minnesotans with low incomes, and a significant one for all commuters. Outside the Minneapolis-St. Paul urban area, the number of Minnesotans living in poverty who share car, truck or van rides to work is estimated to be more than four times the number who take public transit to work. (Within the Minneapolis-St. Paul urban area, about 16 percent of poor workers share rides and about 14 percent take transit to their jobs.)¹³ In many cases, carpools consist of persons from the same household who drive to work together, with one worker dropping the other off at a job before traveling to their own work site. Most carpools are privately organized, although transit agencies in the state encourage carpools and even help match riders. Vanpools – organized by employers, social service agencies and the Metropolitan Council – are a useful option for low-income Minnesotans, too, particularly those in more sparsely populated areas where regular transit service proves difficult to offer.



Source: Census Bureau’s American Community Survey estimates based on years 2007-09.

LAND USE

In the short term, better connections for low-income Minnesotans must address traditional transportation strategies, including transit improvements, increased access to affordable cars and better rideshare options. But to dramatically improve access and travel in the long term, Minnesotans must wrestle with how land is used and how our communities are laid out. Approaches that tie land use to transportation will reduce infrastructure costs and make it far easier for low-income Minnesotans – and everyone – to reach destinations via lower-cost options: transit, shared rides, biking and walking. Current travel preferences and patterns reflect the decades-long emphasis on fast car travel across extended distances. The resulting employment sprawl in the Twin Cities region and some of Minnesota’s other metropolitan areas undercuts the goal of fast transit service to more job sites. Public- and private-sector leadership is needed to boost the number of jobs clustered in transit-friendly locations, particularly downtowns. Housing, too, is a critically important element of land-use strategy, with action needed to boost affordable housing for low-income Minnesotans near transit stops and with access to job locations. Even in smaller communities, the close location of key destinations increases the likelihood that Minnesotans with low incomes can more easily get to where they need to go.

> FURTHER READING:

For more about better connecting low-income Minnesotans to jobs and other important destinations, including proposed investments, policies and choices, download the policy brief at:

www.growthandjustice.org/BC_brief

and report at:

www.growthandjustice.org/BC.

ENDNOTES

9. Based on Census data from the American Community Survey for years 2005-09, which show an estimated 46.6 percent of the Minnesotans in poverty living in the Minneapolis-St. Paul urbanized area and 53.4 percent living outside that metro region.
10. Piyushimita Thakuriah, P. S. Sriraj, Siim Sööt and Joseph Persky, *Economic Benefits of Employment Transportation Services*, Federal Transit Administration and Community Transportation Association of America, University of Illinois at Chicago, June 30, 2008, pp. 1-3. Available at http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articledfiles/UIC_Economic_Benefits_Final_Report2008.pdf.
11. Federal Transit Administration, *Public Transit in the United States*, June 2009, website, http://www.fta.dot.gov/12347_134.html.
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GOAL:

Improve travel and travel choices for Minnesotans

Measures:

- ▶ *Average travel times are below the national average, with increased attention to how we design our communities, how we use existing roadways, ways to reduce demand for travel, and a broader range of travel options.*
- ▶ *Ratings improve for pavement conditions and transportation infrastructure on main routes throughout Minnesota's existing transportation system.*
- ▶ *An increasing share of travelers chooses transportation options other than solo car trips.*

Minnesota's transportation system is a means to an end. Access to destinations is what matters, not the trip itself. When it comes to transportation, government strives to improve that access through its investments and policies. The challenges include deteriorating infrastructure, traffic congestion, and too few travel choices. And the challenges can be difficult. For example, good pavement conditions for all roadways in Minnesota is an expensive benchmark for a state that ranks 12th in the nation for lane miles per capita.¹⁵ While traffic congestion in the Twin Cities is a problem, simply building more lane miles won't end it because new lanes attract new travelers and then become congested to the point where many of those same travelers, just as before, find other routes, avoid the congested route during peak traffic times, or use transit or other transportation alternatives.

To improve travel and travel choices, Minnesota and its communities must, of course, invest in roads and bridges. But beyond this, the public sector needs to find smart and innovative ways to increase the efficiency of existing roadways, focus on improvements with the greatest potential for long-term and system-wide impacts, change land-use patterns to increase easy access to destinations, boost transit use and other alternatives to solo driving, and otherwise lower demand for limited space on our highways.

Building on research into traffic congestion in the Twin Cities region and intercity passenger travel for Greater Minnesota, Growth & Justice identifies seven priority target areas for improving travel and travel choices for Minnesotans: interregional corridors, highway system management, travel demand management, transit, biking and walking, land use changes, and intercity bus service.

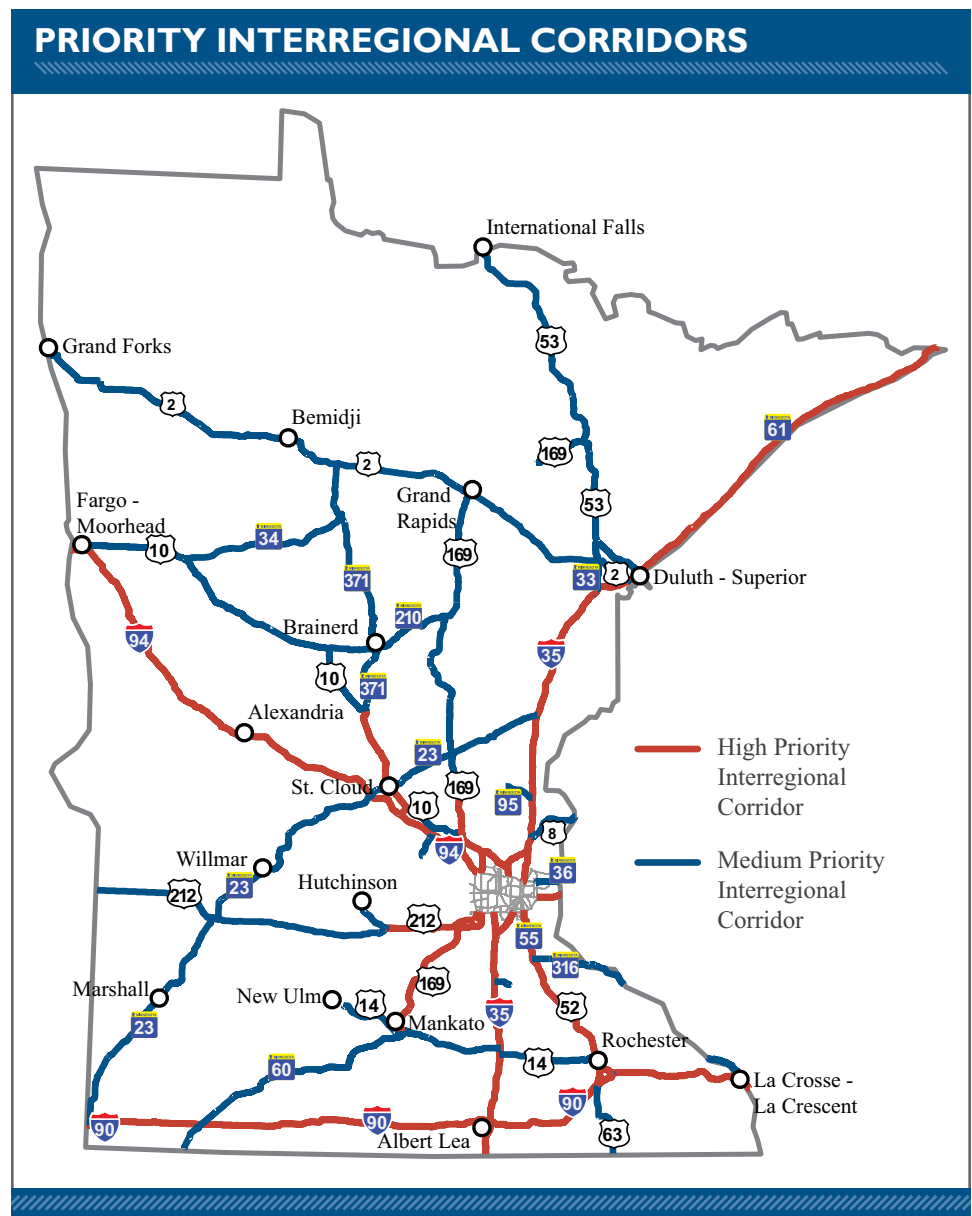
INTERREGIONAL CORRIDORS

The state's IRCs are crucial connections for Minnesotans traveling to and from the important economic centers outside the Twin Cities. These priority highways – an interconnected system of some 3,000 centerline miles linking more than 50 communities – are an important target for state efforts to improve transportation. The priority miles of the IRC system account for only 2 percent of Minnesota's roadway miles but more than one-fourth of the state's vehicle miles traveled.¹⁵ Investments in the system focus on infrastructure preservation, safety, mobility, and opportunities to advance local economic development, with the highest priority placed on infrastructure preservation.

MANAGING AND IMPROVING THE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

The emphasis for highways is shifting away from simply building more lane miles to instead determining how best to improve and manage existing lane miles for better system-wide performance. Because Minnesota has already built up a very extensive highway system in the last 50 years, maintenance and preservation must be the top priority for roadway infrastructure. Beyond this, governments and transportation experts in Minnesota and nationwide are identifying innovative and strategic ways to increase the people-moving capacity of existing highways. Highway system management can alleviate congestion problems, give travelers more options, make trips more predictable, and increase safety. What's more, smart approaches to highway system management can yield these benefits at much lower costs than would be incurred with construction for big highway expansions. Stand-out approaches include active traffic management (e.g., metered ramps at expressway entrances

and rapid response to traffic accidents), intelligent transportation systems (e.g., real-time traveler information on electronic signs over expressway lanes), managed and priced highway lanes (e.g., MnPASS lanes on I-394 and I-35W), and low-cost-but-high-impact highway construction projects. When it comes to the highway system, the best framework for action and investment puts the focus on producing the greatest gains now and in the future at the lowest cost with all factors considered.



Source: Minnesota Department of Transportation

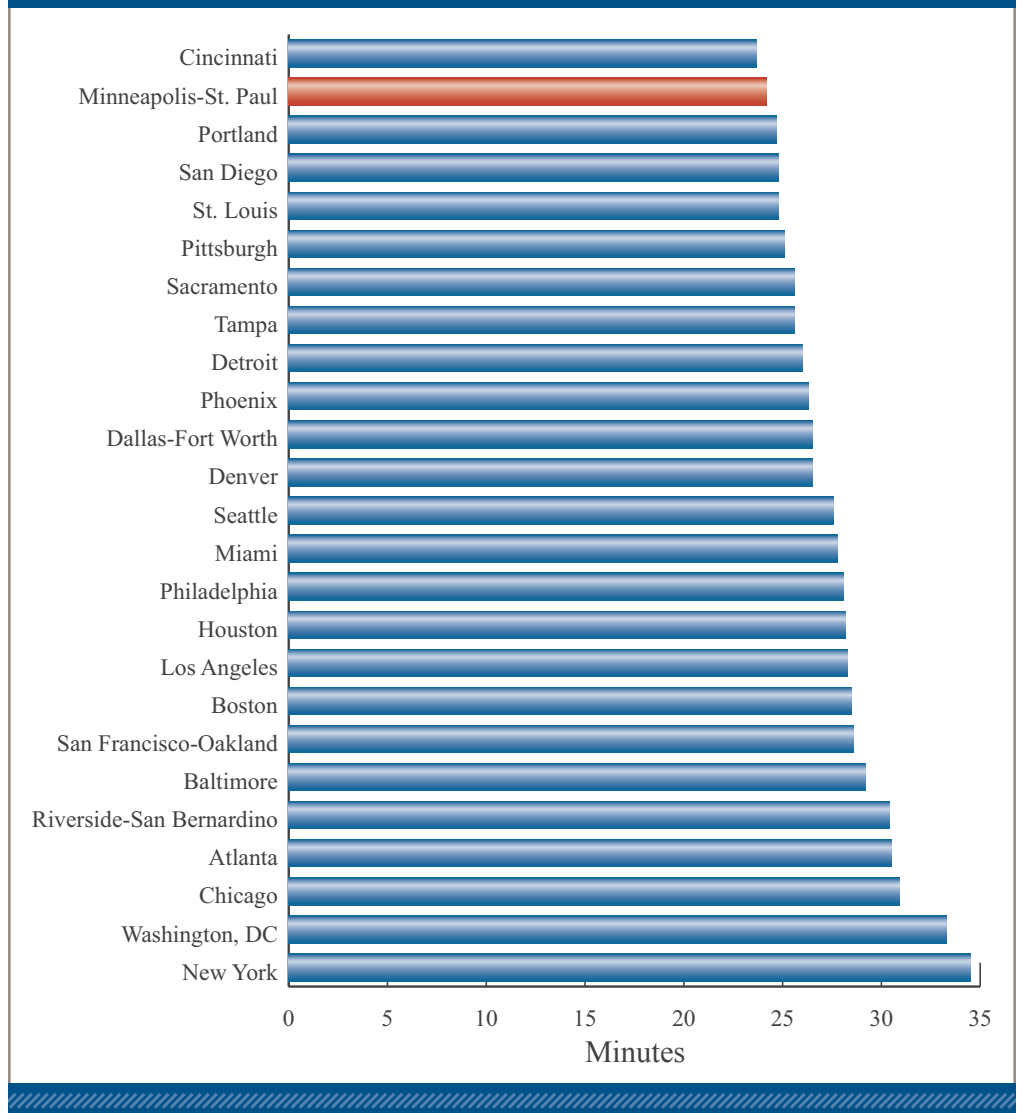
TRAVEL DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Traffic congestion is a supply and demand problem – too much demand for road space given the supply. As demand outstrips supply, metro area travelers pay the price in terms of congestion and traffic delays.¹⁶ A number of approaches can be used to manage the demand side of the transportation equation. One is for travelers to shift away from driving alone. Another is for travelers to shift out of peak drive time. And a third is for travelers to shift out of motor vehicles altogether, through, for example, biking, walking, telecommuting from home, and Skype sessions for meetings. Efforts to reduce the demand for travel can ease congestion, usually at a much lower cost than the supply-side action of adding more lane miles.

TRANSIT

Transit improves travel and travel choices, especially in the context of Twin Cities traffic congestion. Transit increases the capacity of major metro area thoroughfares, carrying more people per vehicle than cars and in less vehicle space per passenger. This frees up room on the road. For example, buses on I-35W into downtown Minneapolis in 2006 carried what otherwise would have been two more full lanes of traffic during the peak morning hour for the stretch of freeway at Lake Street.¹⁷ Just as with roadway expansion, the roadway capacity that's freed up by transit users will fill again because reduced congestion will make the route attractive to drivers who previously had avoided it. But as congestion rises, additional travelers will switch over to transit and help mitigate the problem, yielding significant long-term benefits, assuming there are enough transit vehicles to accommodate those travelers.¹⁸ Even if transit captures a relatively small share of the peak-time travel load, it can improve the traffic flow by keeping off the road those few cars that would otherwise push a crowded-but-flowing lane into gridlock. Of

AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME TO WORK FOR THE 25 LARGEST U.S. METROPOLITAN AREAS



Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey data for 2005-09.

course, affordable mobility, not congestion, is the most fundamental reason for offering transit service.¹⁹ Much of the transit in the state – both in the Twin Cities and statewide – has a bigger impact on access and mobility than on congestion.

BIKING AND WALKING

Biking and walking reduce the number of cars on the road, helping to alleviate traffic congestion. Already, a small but significant share of the workers in the Twin Cities area bike or walk to their jobs – 3.5 percent, according to Census Bureau estimates – and more than 10 percent of the workers living in Minneapolis use these

options to get to jobs.²⁰ In addition, both modes – on foot and on pedal – are important multimodal elements of transit trips because transit riders use them to get to and from bus stops and rail stations. With local governments in the lead, the Twin Cities area has developed an extensive network of walkways and bikeways that commuters tap into. Students, too, are biking and walking, with encouragement from a statewide campaign for safe routes to schools. The potential exists to increase the number of work trips made using these non-motorized means both in the Twin Cities and elsewhere in the state. Safety is a major concern for bikers and walkers, and complete streets – purposely designed not only for cars but for all major travel modes – make walking and biking easier and safer.

LAND USE

Where, how and when we travel depend upon the location of the places we want or need to reach. Minnesotans are often forced to climb into their cars and drive because of sprawling development patterns. More compact development, and a mix of uses close by, allows people to reach destinations without driving cars for long distances and even without driving cars at all. When it comes to the efficient use of transportation infrastructure, concentrations of job sites are important because they make transit service feasible. The catalyst for more compact development is not about how people should organize their lives. Rather the motivation stems from the need to secure a strong return from public-sector investments in the existing transportation infrastructure, to increase the efficiency of the transportation system, and to allow for the continued access and mobility that matter to a state's economic vitality and quality of life. What's more, experts now note strong market forces favoring increased real estate development in central cities and other hubs, driven in part by the housing location preferences of younger adults and the aging baby-boom generation.²¹

INTERCITY BUS SERVICE

Bus travel among Minnesota's cities and beyond offers important transportation links for many Minnesotans, especially young adults, senior citizens and low-income residents. Major trip destinations for intercity bus travel include college campuses, military bases, prisons, medical facilities, and airports and train stations. All intercity bus service in Minnesota – as distinct from rural transit service – is provided by private companies, and nearly all of it is offered either by Minnesota's own Jefferson Lines bus company or by Greyhound Lines. The primary way Minnesota's state government involves itself in intercity bus service is through the distribution of federal funds available specifically for intercity bus

transportation in rural areas under the 5311(f) program. Minnesota's riders benefit from service that fills gaps for rural areas and links to regional trade centers and major metro areas.

> FURTHER READING:

For more about improving travel and travel choices, including proposed investments, policies and choices, download the policy brief on congestion at:

www.growthandjustice.org/Cong_Brief
and report at:

www.growthandjustice.org/Congestion.

To learn more about connecting communities in Greater Minnesota download the policy brief at:

www.growthandjustice.org/GMN_Brief
and the report at:

www.growthandjustice.org/GreaterMN.

ENDNOTES

14. Based on data from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration in Table HM-60 of *Highway Statistics 2009*, available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2009/hm60.cfm>, and on Census estimates for 2009 state populations.
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GOAL:

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation

Measure: Annual vehicle miles per capita decline 20 percent or more by 2025 from the 2009 level of 10,800.²²

The cars and trucks we drive – to work, school, home, shopping and everywhere else – make travel fast and convenient but inflict serious damage on our environment. As our vehicles burn fossil fuels, they emit greenhouse gases (GHGs). Greater atmospheric concentrations of GHGs are raising temperatures, increasing the intensity and occurrence of severe weather and otherwise changing our climate worldwide.²³ In Minnesota, the transportation sector accounts for about one-fourth of the state’s GHG emissions, comprising the second largest source after electrical power generation.²⁴ Nationally cars and light-duty trucks are responsible for 60 percent of all carbon-based GHG emissions from the overall U.S. transportation sector.²⁵

Minnesota in 2007 enacted the Next Generation Energy Act, setting in place state goals for a reduction in GHG emissions of 30 percent from 2005 to 2025 and a reduction of 80 percent from 2005 to 2050.²⁶ Reducing the number of miles we drive will help us reach the state’s goals for GHG emissions – and it will pay off, too, in terms of lower costs for travelers and less wear and tear on the transportation infrastructure. As is, we drive a lot, logging more miles per capita than Californians or Texans or even drivers in our neighboring states of Iowa and Wisconsin.²⁷ As a strategy, reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is not the only way to rein in greenhouse gases from the transportation sector. More efficient vehicles (think hybrid cars) and cleaner fuels (think electricity) help. But the environmental gains from these approaches may be lost if those cars emit less GHG pollution per mile but are then driven more miles. This dilemma makes the reduction in vehicle miles traveled a stand-out issue for transportation in Minnesota.

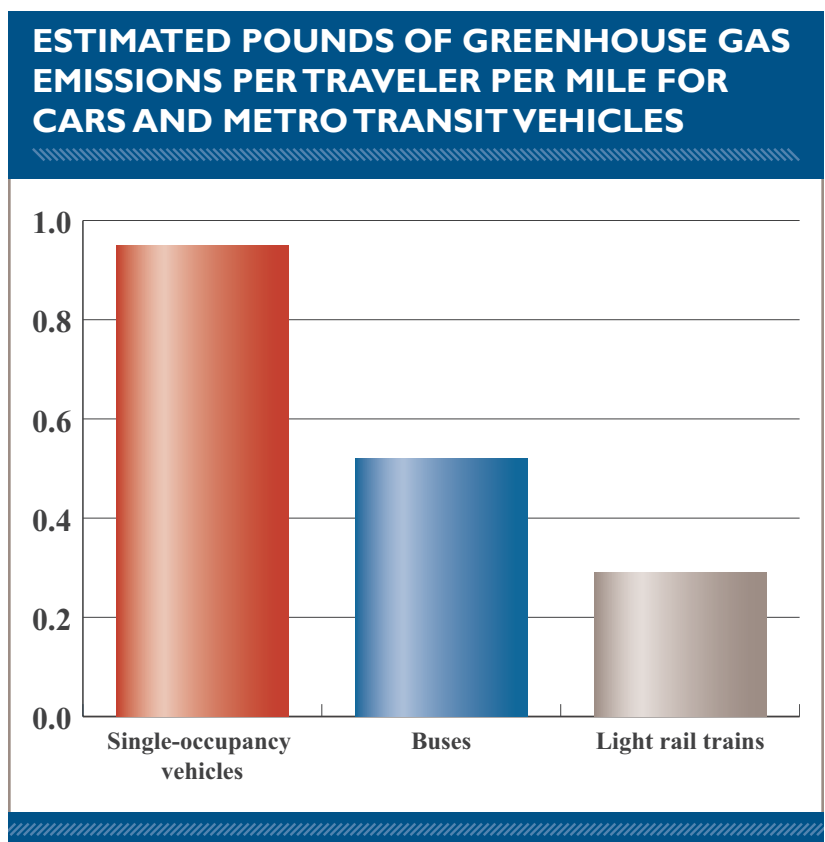
Growth & Justice identifies three important target areas for reducing vehicle miles traveled in the state: land use and transit-oriented development, transit service, and pricing strategies.

LAND USE AND TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

To drive less, we will need to change how we use land and structure our communities. Smart land use emphasizes more compact development – especially for employment and housing – in established communities, with central cities as the focal points. The goal is less sparse development at the urban fringes. Transit-oriented development shapes land use around transit, with denser settlement patterns and a mix of uses near transit stations, plus well-placed bikeways and walkways for easy access. More transit service both supports and spurs land-use changes, and it offers travelers an alternative way to reach their destinations. Moves made now to implement smart growth approaches will yield modest improvements in GHG emissions in the short term because existing residential and commercial structures will shape travel patterns for years to come, but those gains will grow over time and become significant as new and replacement construction is clustered more efficiently. Local zoning regulations often are major barriers to the land-use changes and compact development that could curb driving and reduce GHG emissions. This means that smart-growth development benefits from less – not more – local zoning rules in many cases.²⁸ To spur needed improvements in land use, local governments in particular will need to move beyond business as usual.

TRANSIT

Transit vehicles in urban areas produce fewer emissions per passenger mile than automobiles, as a rule, especially in the case of the increasingly common hybrid buses. While a bus, for example, spews out more pollution than a car, the bus carries more passengers. A typical bus with seven riders is about twice as energy efficient as an average car, and a bus with 50 riders is about 10 times as energy efficient.²⁹ Increases in transit use alone will produce modest decreases in vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions, with the improvements growing somewhat over time. Transit is more efficient, cost-effective and popular when an urban area has compact development with concentrations of important destinations, especially job sites. For this reason, land-use patterns greatly affect the success of transit systems, and transit and land use are complementary strategies for minimizing the environmental impacts of transportation. Research shows that increased transit use combined with smart land-use patterns will achieve greater reductions in GHG emissions than either transit initiatives or land-use changes on their own.³⁰



Source: Metro Transit, 2010. Bus miles include service runs without passengers

PRICING STRATEGIES

Transportation pricing policies and arrangements can reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions if they increase, in obvious ways, the expense of driving – or of driving more. Examples of costs tied to VMT include gas taxes, toll roads where the charge is based on distance, and insurance rates set according to how many miles the insured vehicle logs during the billing period. Some have proposed that drivers pay transportation taxes based directly upon how many miles they travel, both to better tie the taxes to travel and to provide a new funding stream for transportation spending in light of increased fuel efficiency for vehicles and a resulting slowdown in gas tax revenues. But pricing policies often are controversial for the very reason they work: They increase the cost that drivers (and voters) pay to operate their cars, although quite often, pricing strategies simply shift onto drivers those costs that otherwise are hidden and paid by others.³¹ Some strategies are well-suited for state and local action. But action at the national or multi-state regional levels will work better than state-level initiatives for some pricing policies – for example, substantial increases in the gas tax, a broader carbon tax, or a cap-and-trade system for GHG emissions.

> FURTHER READING:

For more about reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, including proposed investments, policies and choices, download the policy brief at:

www.growthandjustice.org/GHG_Brief
and report at:
www.growthandjustice.org/GHG.

ENDNOTES

22. Based on data from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration in Table VM-2 of *Highway Statistics 2009*, available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2009/vm2.cfm>, and on Census estimates for 2009 state populations.
23. Frank Gallivan and Michael Grant, *Current Practices in Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Transit: A Synthesis of Transit Practice* (TCRP Synthesis 84), Transportation Research Board of the National Academies, 2010, p. 1. Available at http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_84.pdf.
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Moving Forward

Investments in our transportation system, done right, pay off in terms of economic growth, expanded prosperity and improved quality of life. Even in tight fiscal times, Minnesota's public sector must address transportation needs and challenges. Efficient and effective transportation matters to business and to all residents of the state. It is especially important to Minnesotans with low incomes and limited transportation options.

Given the state's existing and extensive network of roadways, action on surface transportation increasingly centers on first fixing what we have already and maximizing our use of it. Innovative approaches look beyond the traditional transportation strategies and tap active traffic management, intelligent traffic systems, travel demand management, land use changes, and transit and other alternatives to solo car trips. For new construction, the public sector must focus on high-benefit projects and cost-effective options.

The four goals presented in this report are important guides for what Minnesota's transportation system should accomplish – improve travel time and efficiency for freight, better connect low-income Minnesotans to jobs and other important destinations, improve travel and travel choices for Minnesotans, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. For greatest impact, these goals should be considered together.

For specific investments, policies and choices regarding *Smart InvestmentsSM in Transportation for Minnesota* link to the Growth & Justice series of reports and briefs on transportation (available at: www.growthandjustice.org/tr).

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