Dear legislative candidate:

As a candidate for the Minnesota Legislature you are aware of the importance of an efficient transportation system to the future of Minnesota. You are also well aware of the debate that has taken place over the past few sessions of the legislature as to how to fund and what to fund to assure that that system operates as effectively as possible for as many Minnesotans as possible.

A year ago, the three of us helped create what has become known as the Minnesota Mayoral Active Transportation Caucus. It is an informal organization of 56 mayors from Greater and suburban Minnesota that was created to help highlight the importance of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to communities throughout the state.

The members of the caucus recognize that Minnesota needs to repair and rebuild its aging roads and bridges. We understand that mass transit is important to the state’s future. However, we also believe that our communities need the resources necessary to become safer and more vibrant by updating and modernizing our infrastructure to meet the growing needs of pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages. These needs include safety, accessibility, connectivity, business and economic opportunities, and of course improved health and environmental benefits.

Because transportation is once again front and center this election, we thought we would prepare and send to you the enclosed fact sheet. It details the pedestrian and bicycle needs of Minnesota’s communities as well as the benefits of investing in active transportation. The information will help you answer questions you may receive. Our informal Caucus has focused on Greater and suburban Minnesota’s growing need for safe and efficient pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, how that infrastructure fits into Minnesota’s overall transportation system and complements what is going on in the urban core.

If you have questions or need assistance, please don’t hesitate to reach out to any of us at any time.

Sincerely,

Ardell Brede
Mayor of Rochester

Mary Hamann-Roland
Mayor of Apple Valley

Hank Ludtke
Mayor of Frazee

The Minnesota Mayoral Active Transportation Caucus has been created to highlight the importance of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to the communities of Minnesota.
Defining “active transportation”
Active transportation refers to getting around by expending human energy – primarily walking and bicycling. Active transportation infrastructure can include sidewalks, safer street crossings, bicycle routes and street and sidewalk lighting.

Active transportation needs of Greater and suburban Minnesota
Walking and bicycling are increasing throughout Minnesota. A 2014 statewide survey found that 70 percent of Minnesotans, or members of their household, walk daily or at least once a week in their community—and more than a third walk every single day.i More than 50% of Minnesotans bicycle every year and an additional 22% said they or members of their household bicycle at least once a week in their community. Six percent said they or members of their household bicycle every day.ii

Active transportation infrastructure is not keeping pace with need
City and county leaders throughout Minnesota have reported a backlog of $1.3 billion in projects for sidewalks, curb ramps, safer intersections, and bike routes and trails.iii MnDOT currently estimates it will have only half the revenue needed for pedestrian and bicycle investments in the state’s trunk highway corridors alone.iv

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding also cannot meet demand—during the last round of funding, Minnesota applicants sought $21 million to construct pedestrian and bicycle projects but only $6 million was available from this federal transportation program. TAP funds have consistently only been able to fund about 20 -30% of the requests each year.v

(over)
Benefits of active transportation infrastructure

Active transportation investments bring huge benefits to Minnesota. Those benefits include increased safety, improved health and locally based economic development opportunities.

Safety: In 2014, 17 pedestrians were killed and 837 pedestrians were injured. That same year, 755 bicyclists were injured and five bicyclists were killed. vi

Health: More than 60% of Minnesota adults are overweight or obese. viii Approximately 22% of Minnesota students report that they are overweight or obese. viii By 2020, Minnesotans will spend an estimated $3.7 billion on the healthcare costs associated with these health conditions. ix Lack of physical activity, along with eating habits, are leading contributors to the obesity epidemic. x

Business: Walking and biking routes have become an economic development engine and a means of attracting and retaining a strong workforce in many communities throughout Minnesota. Several of Minnesota’s internationally known brands have been recognized nationally as Bicycle Friendly Businesses—such as 3M, General Mills, and Target—along with more than 70 other businesses, including 35 in Greater Minnesota.

Those same employers also experience lower health-care costs and a healthier work force due to the benefits of walking and biking among their employees. A Bloomington company that has more than 100 employees who bicycle to work two or more days a week found that their healthcare costs for those employees was about one-half of that of the employees who did not ride to work on a regular basis.

Compatibility of active transportation investments with bridge and road reconstruction

Without question Minnesota needs to rebuild its system of roads and bridges. But it also needs to improve the active transportation network, thereby helping to increase safety, health and economic opportunities for all Minnesota communities.

The most efficient and cost effective time to improve and develop pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is when roads and bridges are also being improved and rebuilt versus going back and attempting to add active transportation features once the projects are completed. The federal government realized this and created the TAP program in 1992.

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vii American Heart Association, 2014. Minnesota Active Transportation Poll. Available at http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Affiliate/Minnesota-Active-Transportation-Poll_UCM_469043_Article.

viii Transit for Livable Communities. Review of MnDOT and city and county plans proposing bicycle and pedestrian projects and networks across the state.

ix MnDOT. Minnesota Go State Highway Investment Plan, pp. 56-60

x MnDOT. Response to query about 2013-14 solicitation


