



March 6, 2023

Dear Chair Dibble and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

The Metropolitan Council was created by the legislature in 1967 and the governance of the Council has been studied and debated regularly since its inception. Over time, the Council's statutory roles have grown as the legislature has added land use and transportation planning functions, wastewater management and water supply advisory work, metropolitan regional park planning, transitway construction and the delivery of transit operations to its responsibilities. The Council also operates a Housing and Redevelopment Authority, known as Metro HRA, that provides housing for more than 7,200 households throughout Anoka, Carver, and suburban Hennepin and Ramsey counties in the Twin Cities region. The impact on each of these statutory responsibilities needs to be taken into consideration when any governance bill or study is presented.

The Walz-Flanagan Administration appreciates the opportunity to engage in dialogue on SF 1624 moving forward. As noted above, the functions of the Metropolitan Council are wide-ranging, but as this bill is being heard in the Senate Transportation Committee, we wanted to provide comment on one potential consequence of moving to an elected Met Council that the Committee should consider.

As the federally designated and recognized Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Council, with advice from Transportation Advisory Board, conducts both long range and short-range transportation planning and programs federal funds apportioned to our metropolitan area. Before making a change to the governance model, it would be important to study impact on the Council's MPO designation.

If redesignation is necessary, federal law prescribes that the MPO be redesignated by agreement between the Governor and units of general purpose local government that together represent at least 75 percent of the existing planning area population including the largest incorporated city (based on population and in our case, Minneapolis) as determined by the Bureau of the Census.

If an MPO is redesignated, it must meet all the requirements of federal law including that the MPO board consist of local elected officials, officials of public agencies that administer or operate major modes of transportation in the metropolitan area, including representation by providers of public transportation; and appropriate State officials. This would also eliminate the need for the Transportation Advisory Board.

State law (473.146) established the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) to advise the Council on several of its transportation planning responsibilities. The Metropolitan Council works closely with the TAB, comprised of local appointed and elected officials, agency representatives, and citizen members. The 34-member body is an important body for transportation planning and coordination. Policy discussions and recommendations from the TAB advance regional coordination by incorporating local, state, modal, and regional perspectives, and by fostering relationships amongst members that yield further coordination.

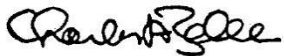
Under redesignation, the MPO would also need to represent the entire urbanized area as defined by the US Census, which includes portions of Sherburne and Wright counties. The urbanized area (defined by the US Census) is currently changing; urbanized areas of western Wisconsin may no longer be in the

designated 2020 Metropolitan Area but may rejoin in the next urbanized area boundary update (~2032). These factors of geographic representation must be considered carefully if redesignation were to occur.

An area of uncertainty is whether transportation grants would be affected during a redesignation process. Instances of redesignation are rare; there are not significant examples to draw from. We might expect the Council would remain as MPO until a new designation is completed. However, any potential governance change adds complexity and uncertainty in federal grants. If the redesignation process is contentious or delayed this could slow or affect discretionary grant processes such as Transitway Capital Investment Grants, the Regional Solicitation or other high profile federal grant programs. Federal agencies look for stability and cohesion in any region seeking competitive grant awards.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charlie Zelle". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Charlie Zelle

Chair, Metropolitan Council