

March 6, 2023

Senator Scott Dibble, Chair
Senate Transportation Committee
Room 3107, Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue West
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Dibble and Senate Transportation Committee Members:

Thank you, Chair Dibble for authoring SF1624, and for providing the opportunity to share comments on how best to ensure a responsive, accountable, and collaborative system of regional governance in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

The Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA) represents fifteen of Minnesota's larger and faster growing counties, including four suburban and eleven Greater Minnesota counties.

Our Association, and our metropolitan county members, have long supported a Metropolitan Council composition that includes a majority of members being local elected officials, appointed from the cities and counties within the region. We believe such a governance structure would best support effective and accountable regional planning and program operations for the following reasons:

- Local governments in the metropolitan area, along with residents of and visitors to the area, are primary constituencies of the Council. A governance structure that includes the voice of those local entities would better facilitate collaboration and partnership on decision-making.
- Local elected officials are directly, politically accountable to voters within the metropolitan area, strengthening understanding and responsive of regional governance decisions and operations.
- Such a structure and appointment process could be designed to ensure the resulting full Council also satisfies the composition requirements to serve as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) under federal law.

SF1624 takes a different approach by proposing to replace the existing Council structure with a 17-member elected Metropolitan Council. We do not support that reform approach but appreciate past opportunities to discuss alternative governance structures. As the legislation moves forward, we seek continued consideration of how a reformed Metropolitan Council structure would best meet shared goals, including that:

- As the Council's scope and authority have expanded, including responsibility for operations impacting the daily activities of metropolitan residents, and the operations and decisions of metropolitan governments, the Council structure has not evolved to ensure the voice of residents and metropolitan local governments are directly represented in Council decision-making.
- While the Council has broad taxing authority, there is no opportunity for metropolitan area residents to directly hold Council members accountable.
- A reformed regional governance structure must ensure that all metropolitan area communities have an equitable voice in regional planning and programs.

The role of both the Metropolitan Council and counties has evolved significantly over time. Counties, for example, have increased responsibility for direct provision of services that have regional significance — such as hazardous and solid waste management, transit funding and transitway development, regional parks, regional highways, water resources planning and watershed management, greenway and bikeway development, farmland and open space preservation, the regional library system, and more.

Meanwhile, federal law requirements for metropolitan planning organization membership have also evolved along with the role and responsibilities of regional governments. A 'council of governments' model would closely align with successful regional governance structures across the nation, and provide for effective, accountable, responsive governance.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share these comments with the Committee.

We welcome continued opportunities to work with you and stakeholders on this important reform.

Sincerely,



Matt Massman, *Executive Director*
Minnesota Inter-County Association