

April 1, 2025

To Whom it May Concern,

I am in favor of bills SF 0817 and SF 1972.

I study the long term effects of highways and the physical, environmental, and mental health tolls they have taken can and must be remediated. Please pass these bills and support a healthier future for our communities!

When Eisenhower oversaw the implementation of the Federal Highways Act, he was dismayed that cities were using interstate funds to solve urban congestion problems. His appointed highway engineer believed that public transit, not cars, were the logical solution for city congestion. But in an election year 1956 (the year the Federal Highway Act was passed) there was tremendous political pressure to appease the cities who were so eager to put interstates through their urban cores and bring what many were deceived into thinking would be an aesthetically pleasing, modern marvel.

We all know that interstate travel through cities has created huge gashes between neighborhoods, terrible noise and air pollution for houses adjacent to them, and generally unpleasant and monotonous travel experiences. Car and highway dependency is not a given—it has benefited a few at the expense of many under the guise of efficiency. Efficiency for employers, not for quality of life or healthy, safer lives.

I work with the University of Minnesota's Long Term Ecological Research project and have also worked with many neighborhoods in the Twin Cities as a public historian. Understanding the history and long term effects of highways, it seems imperative that Minnesota take a more creative and sustainable approach and invest far more in making public transit accessible, safe and effective in the Twin Cities. This would result in much less burden on existing roads and bridges, the threat road salt is posing to our groundwater and other freshwater resources, and improve urban quality of life dramatically.

According to the report of MPCA staff at the Phillips Community Center neighborhood meeting about the Smith Foundry air pollution last year, I-35 and Highway 55 contribute more to Phillips longstanding air and soil pollution problems than any industrial factor within the neighborhood. This corridor especially deserves a break—home to Indigenous and refugee populations, many hospitals caring for those with compromised immune systems, home to pioneering urban gardens (which the city has invested in), part of the Southside Green Zone, as well as beloved artists and neighborhood organizations like Heart of the Beast which provides education and delight to so many South Minneapolis kids and adults.

There are communities around the city who would benefit more from a different approach to transportation than they ever will from the highway system remaining as it is. Using highway funds to invest in sustainable solutions is a great way forward. Considering the cumulative impacts will help policy makers and transportation planners make better policies and leave better legacies than their predecessors.

Thank you for considering these bills and I hope you will support our collective healthier future.

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