

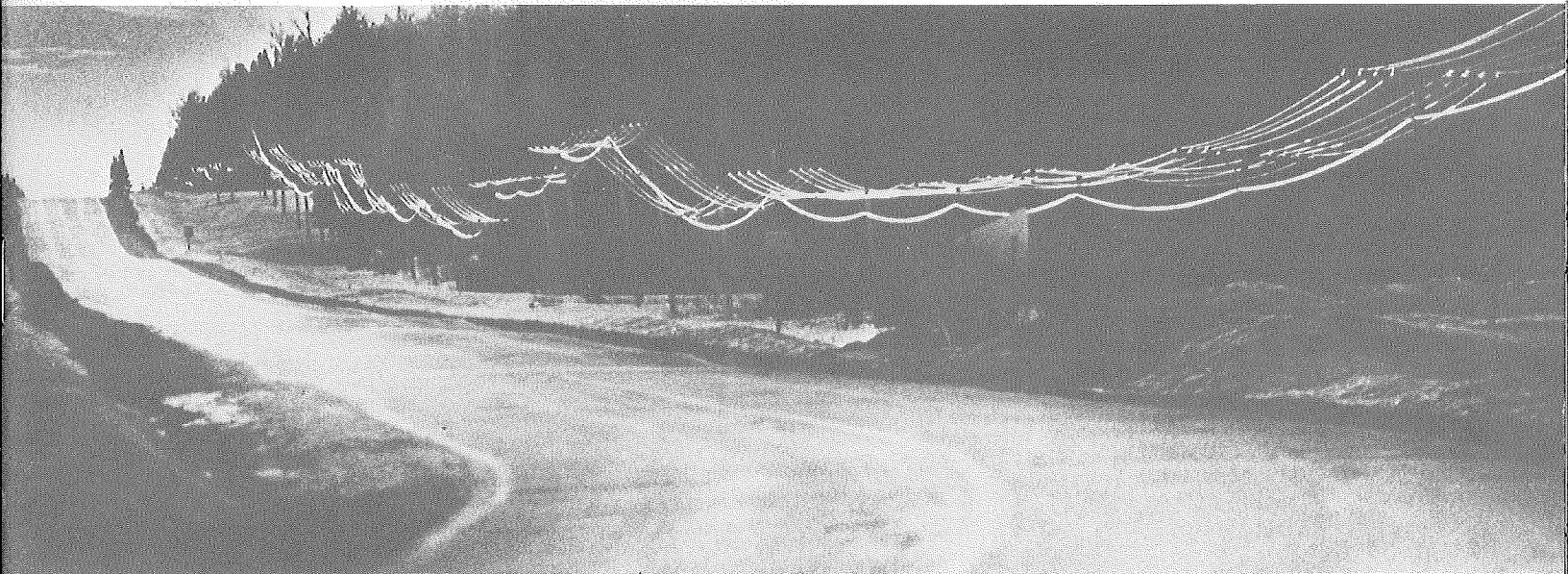
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Opening Voyageurs To Everyone

A Federal Responsibility to Improve Highway 53



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STATE OF MINNESOTA

The State of Minnesota and its residents, especially those in the northeastern region known as Arrowhead, are extremely proud that the U.S. Congress has chosen to set aside a large section of our land as the Voyageurs National Park.

Minnesotans have always felt this natural resource was special, and we are glad Congress decided to preserve it for fellow Americans to appreciate today and in the future.

But as proud as we are, we can't ignore a problem which the designation of Voyageurs National Park has created: U.S. Highway 53, the only real artery into the park, is inadequate to safely and conveniently carry the increased traffic the new park is expected to generate. The two-lane Highway 53 currently serves an important local function. For a combination of reasons, the State of Minnesota does not have the finances available to make the required road improvements for Highway 53 to also function as the main roadway to Voyageurs National Park.

This presents a unique situation: a problem was created by the federal government when it designated Voyageurs a national park. Minnesota doesn't have the money to solve the problem even though Minnesota remains committed to the concept of the park. Because the federal government was largely responsible for creating this dilemma, the State of Minnesota feels it is largely responsible for providing an adequate solution by financing the improvement of U.S. Highway 53 into a four-lane roadway.

Summary

• Voyageurs National Park was created by the federal government and it, therefore, has a responsibility to the rest of the nation as well as to the people of the Arrowhead Region Page 2-3

• Practically speaking, there is only a two-lane highway to service Voyageurs National Park. It is Highway 53 Page 4

• Development of Voyageurs National Park will double existing traffic on Highway 53 and will attract a number of recreational vehicles reducing road capacity and slowing other traffic. Page 5-8

• The local economy of the Arrowhead Region depends on Highway 53 to transport goods and to serve tourists. Increased congestion could have adverse effects on that economic base Page 8-12

• Cost of improving Highway 53 will be \$90,000,000. Minnesota's commitment to the park was made prior to full knowledge of increased highway costs and lowered highway revenues. State funds are inadequate to make necessary repairs Page 12-15

• Local residents support improvements of Highway 53 Page 16

Voyageurs National Park

The 219,000-acre Voyageurs National Park was established in 1971 by the U.S. Congress "to preserve, for the inspiration and enjoyment of present and future generations, the outstanding scenery, geological conditions and waterway system which constituted a part of the historic route of the Voyageurs who contributed significantly to the opening of the Northwestern United States."

A condition of the establishment of the park was the donation of state, county and municipally owned land (37,500 acres).

Nationally Valued Scenery And Resources

Voyageurs National Park lies in what is known as the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota. This area is abundant with beautiful scenery and natural resources, but is relatively sparsely populated.

Resources found there are important to the economy of the entire nation. Taconite mines produce over half of the U.S. iron ore shipments. Forests provide paper products and

home heating insulation, a commodity essential in this time of energy problems. And the forests and lakes are the scenery for which northern Minnesota is famous and on which its tourism industry relies.

The Park is Already Open

Although many of the planned facilities are not yet developed, Voyageurs National Park is currently "open." Park facilities presently consist of a few backpacking campsites which existed when the land was purchased.

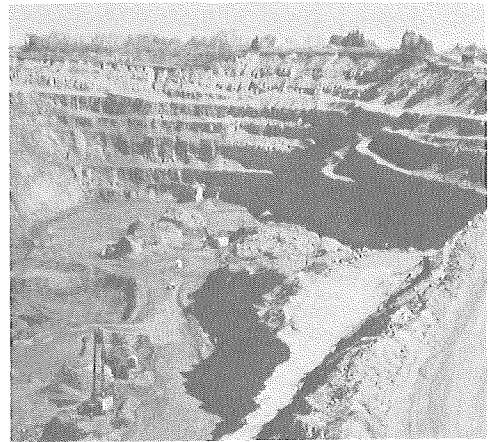
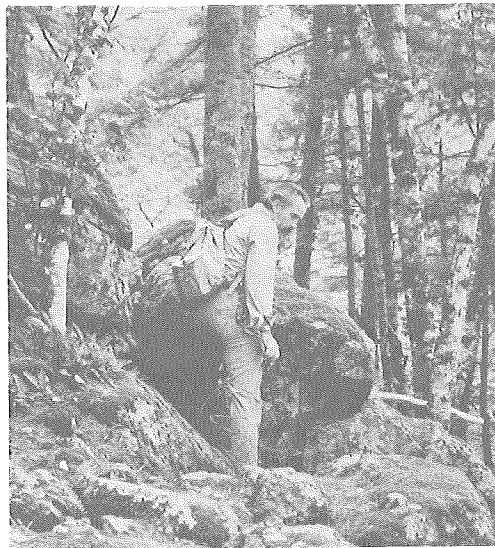
Visitor services in Voyageurs will be limited to primitive camping sites accessible by hiking and/or boat only. Automobile travel within the park will be restricted to the parking lots and access roads.

The only in-park facility will be visitor centers to be completed by 1985. Other food and lodging facilities will be provided by private operators outside the park boundaries.

The Federal Government's Responsibility

Because a national park is a federal recreation area, and because national parks should be accessible to everyone, Minnesota feels the federal government has a major responsibility for providing adequate means by which the largest number of people may safely and conveniently visit national parks.

We also feel that the federal designation of an area as a national park should in no way harm the existing economy of the area.



Access to Voyageurs

Practically speaking, there is only one two-lane highway that serves the Voyageurs National Park area and that is U.S. 53.

Only Major Road

U.S. 53 is the only major highway between U.S. 61 on the east and U.S. 71 to the west. The project area, from U.S. 169 to International Falls depends on U.S. 53 to support tourism and natural resource development as well as to transport visitors to Voyageurs National Park.

It is estimated that 92 percent of the visitors to Voyageurs will approach from the south on U.S. 53. Lake Superior creates a barrier causing most visitors living east of the park to travel through Duluth and approach the park from the south via U.S. 53.

Traffic Congestion More than Yellowstone

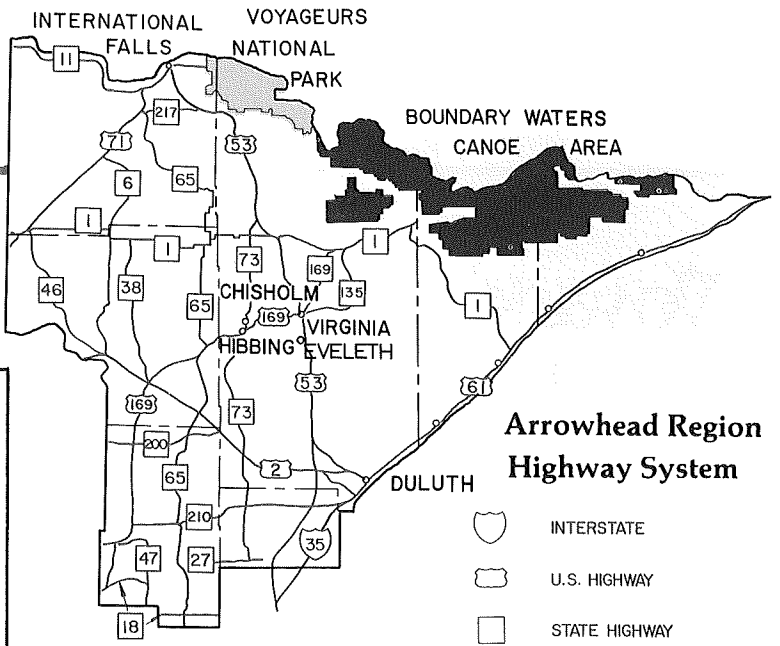
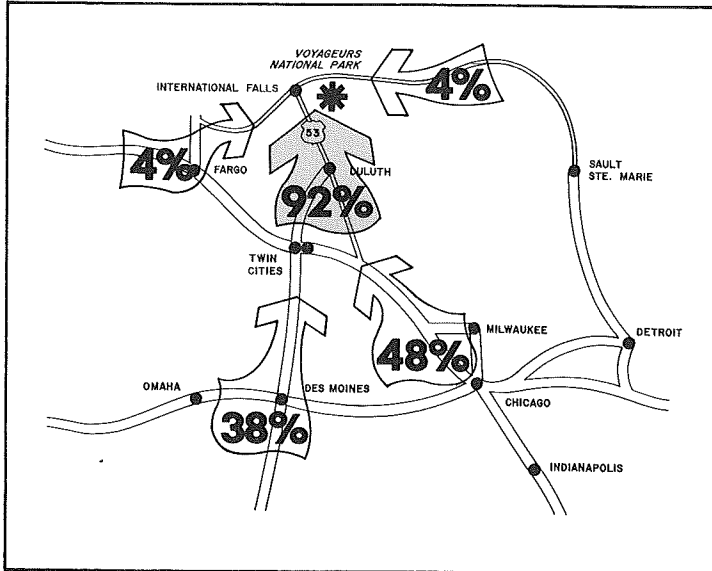
There will be more national park visitors per traffic lane on U.S. 53 than for any other national park analyzed, even those with several times more visitors than expected at Voyageurs.

Most national parks have highways from three or four directions. Voyageurs will be restricted to one direction. Even though there are very few four-lane highways into parks, the unusual geographic location of Voyageurs places a burden on a single highway that cannot suitably handle peak period traffic with only two driving lanes. The tourists cannot select an alternative route because none exists.

More Miles of Congestion Approaching Park

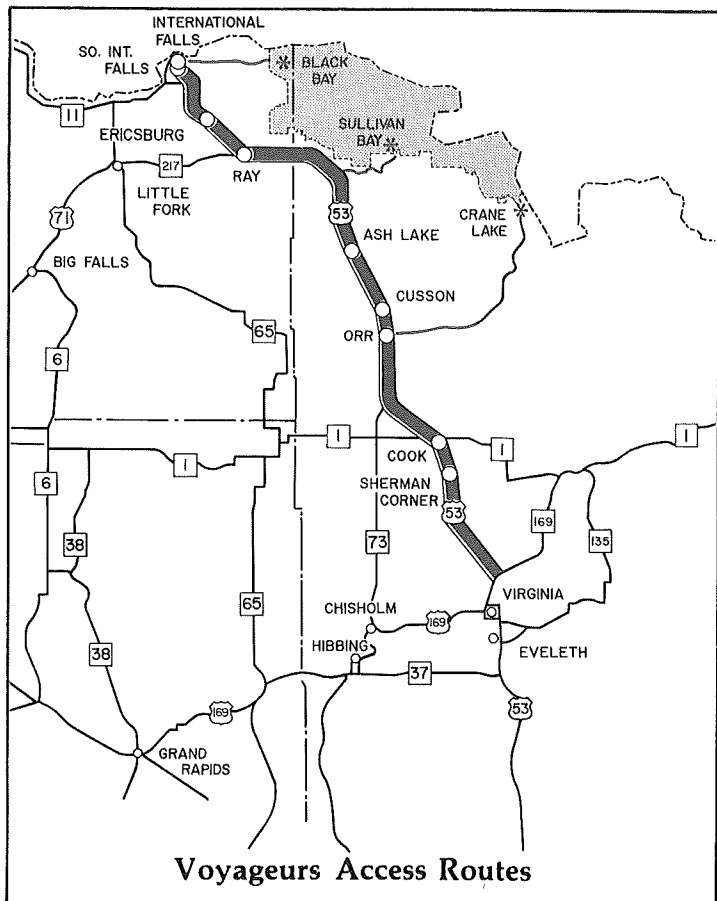
The congestion of a two-lane U.S. 53 is intensified by the relatively long distance from the park to a four-lane highway. U.S. 53 is a four-lane divided highway only as far north as U.S. 169. That's about 75 miles south of the nearest visitors center at Voyageurs. Most other national parks gain highway lanes at a 30-mile radius relieving traffic congestion and allowing tourists options.

Visitor Distribution On Highway Routes To Voyageurs National Park



Number Of Visits Per Inbound Lane To Selected National Parks

PARK (STATE)	NUMBER OF VISITS 1975	NUMBER OF LANES PROVIDED AT		VISITS PER LANE	
		PARK ACCESS	30 MILE RADIUS	PARK ACCESS	30 MILE RADIUS
ZION (UTAH)	1,109,400	2	7	554,700	158,486
PETRIFIED FOREST (ARIZONA)	1,388,000	6	8	231,333	173,500
YELLOWSTONE (WYOMING)	2,520,900	5	8	504,180	315,112
ROCKY MOUNTAIN (COLORADO)	2,684,300	4	6	671,075	447,383
GLACIER (MONTANA)	1,391,500	5	8	278,300	173,938
GRAND TETON (WYOMING)	3,930,800	3	5	1,310,267	786,160
VOYAGEURS (MINNESOTA)	1,500,000 (PROJECTION)	2	3	750,000	500,000



Voyageurs Traffic

The present traffic volumes on U.S. 53 have a high monthly variation. Average summer day volumes are approximately double winter volumes now. The summer traffic already includes many campers and trailers.

Traffic Will Double

New national parks do not attract visitors like older, mature parks. The maturity of Voyageurs is estimated to take from five to fifteen years. After maturity, visitor growth will be similar to other national parks. Park attendance is expected to grow greatly after visitor centers have been constructed by 1985.

Projections of visitors for the year 2000 have a considerable range depending on the assumptions used. "Entry" projections more closely reflect the demand that will be placed on Highway 53 since visitors often leave and re-enter the park. Such projections also vary but unquestionably the traffic on Highway 53 will be substantially higher.

Commuting Will Increase Traffic

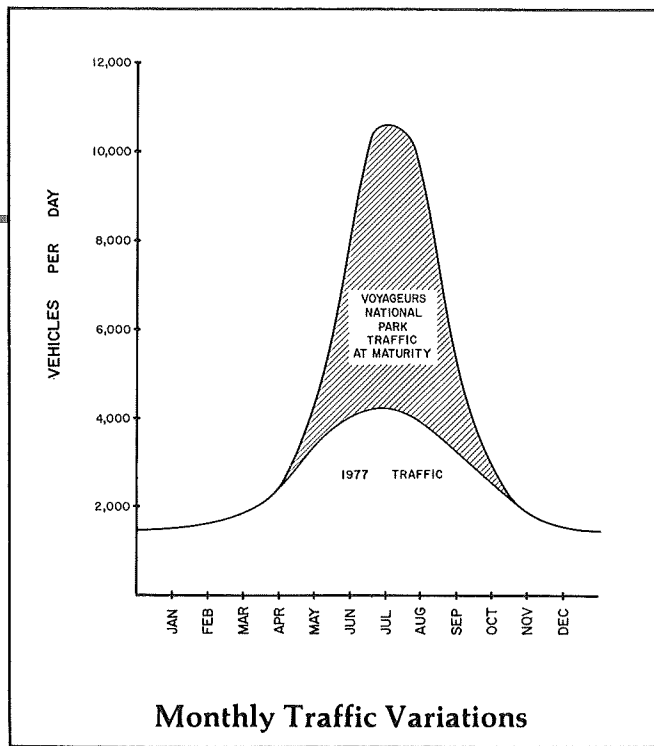
Since there will be no food or lodging facilities within the park, visitors will have to commute outside the park for these services. Local governments have expressed a desire to locate these services in or adjacent to existing developments so they can be served by municipal utilities. Most of these developments are many miles from the south entrance to the park where Highway 53 is still a two-lane road.

Slow Moving Traffic

Voyageurs-bound tourists can be expected to be hauling campers, motor homes, mobile homes, snowmobiles and boats. The combination of recreational vehicles and equipment, plus increased numbers of sightseers will mean lower speeds along Highway 53. This will hinder local residents, tourists and existing commercial and industrial traffic.

Winter Visitors

Most visitors are expected during the summer, and the projections on Page 7 reflect anticipated summer visits. However, the National Park Service has included winter activities in planning for Voyageurs National Park. Snowmobile and cross country ski trails are part of the total plan. Winter visitors must be considered in addition to the previous figures. Since winter driving creates extra safety hazards, Voyageurs access must have a very high level safety design.



Engineering Old-Fashioned Highway 53 follows an old roadway. Most alignment of this road was established in the early 1900's. Surfacing (asphalt) was added to the original construction. The State has recently committed funds to remove the load restrictions during spring thaws caused by limited pavement strengths. Also, the road has limited shoulder width, steep ditch slopes and 93 no passing zones in a 97 mile stretch. Some but not all of these problems will be corrected by the planned state construction, however it will still be virtually impossible to safely pass a slow-moving vehicle in many areas.

Accidents Will Increase

The existing highway has a relatively low accident rate. The addition of a large number of vehicles due to Voyageurs traffic will increase traffic congestion and accident potential.

Local and Regional Traffic

Besides visitors to Voyageurs National Park, Highway 53 will need to continue serving traditional users in an efficient way. There is local concern that unless improvements are made to Highway 53, the local economy will be hurt.

Trans-Canadian Travel

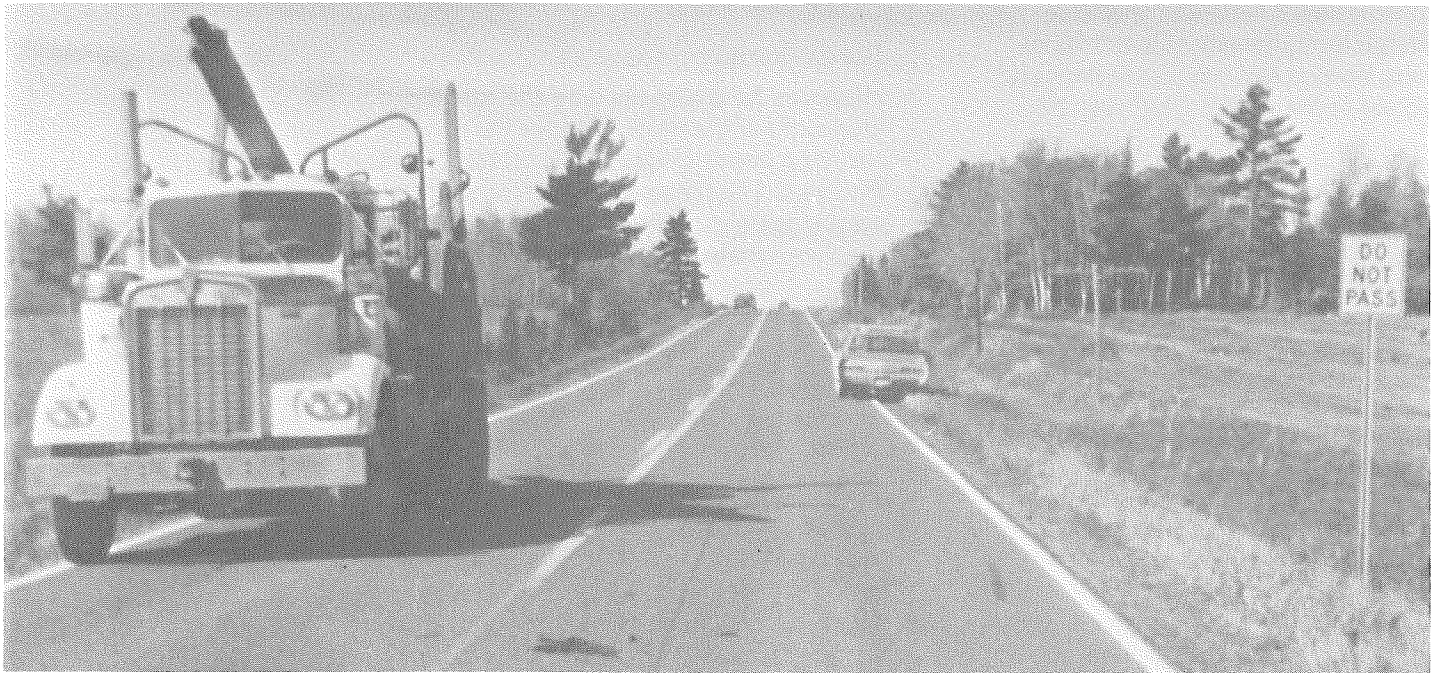
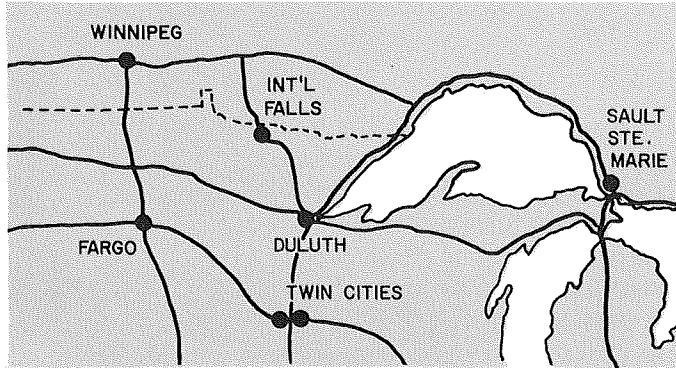
U.S. 53 is a viable route for Canadian traffic. From the termination of Interstate 35 at Duluth to the U.S.-Canadian border, U.S. 53 serves the population of the Arrowhead Region.

Highway 53 also provides a route to Winnipeg, the financial center of Western Canada.

Border Crossings At International Falls

The International Falls border crossing has the highest usage of any crossing from Michigan to Washington, even more than Interstate 15 in Montana and Interstate 29 in North Dakota. Crossing at International Falls may increase too, as many tourists traveling 500-1,000 miles to Voyageurs National Park could be expected to continue into Canada for a short trip.

Border Crossings



Numerous Tourist Attractions

Just as the forests and lakes in Voyageurs National Park are valued by sportsmen and tourists, other attractions in the Arrowhead Region are also valued for their beauty.

For years, sportsmen have been visiting these areas to fish and camp. Highway 53 is the major access to resorts concentrated around Vermillion, Pelican, Crane and Kabetogama Lakes.

The North Shore Drive, Duluth, International Falls and the Iron Range Interpretative Center have long been prized tourist centers and access to them is by Highway 53.

Sportsmen May Go Elsewhere

The local economic benefits from Voyageurs National Park will be reduced if sportsmen and tourists who have visited other resorts in the project area in past years go elsewhere to avoid traffic congestion on U.S. 53. Although the lakes and forests in the area offer excellent fishing, good accommodations and a restful environment, this is not a unique combination of attributes in northern Minnesota. Existing visitors may decide other locations with less traffic congestion are nearly as attractive. This could greatly hurt an already limited economy.

Mining Depends on Highway 53

Mining interests contribute a major percentage to the economic base of the Arrowhead Region. Highway 53 is extensively used for commuting to the iron mining area around Virginia. Copper-nickel mining is

a potential economic generator in the Arrowhead Region. Copper-nickel leases are currently held in St. Louis and Koochiching Counties. U.S. Highway 53 is a major highway link connecting these two primary lease concentrations. With copper a strategic material during national and international emergencies, part of Highway 53 has been designated as part of the Crisis Relocation Plan for Duluth. Therefore, it is important that this road is adequate to serve this need.

Forest Products Industry Depends on Highway 53

Highway 53 is also used by the forest products industry for transporting logs for process and carrying paper insulation products to major markets. The forest products industry contributes a substantial percentage to the economic base of the Arrowhead Region.

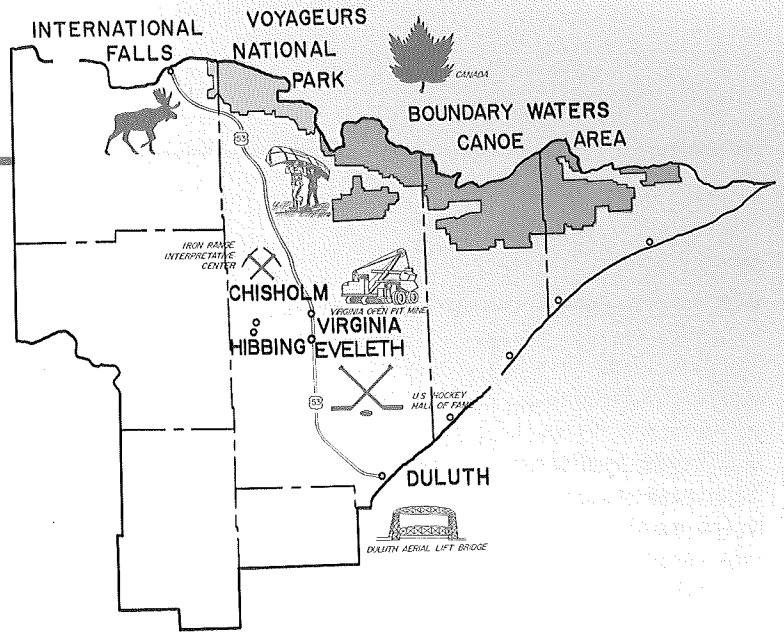
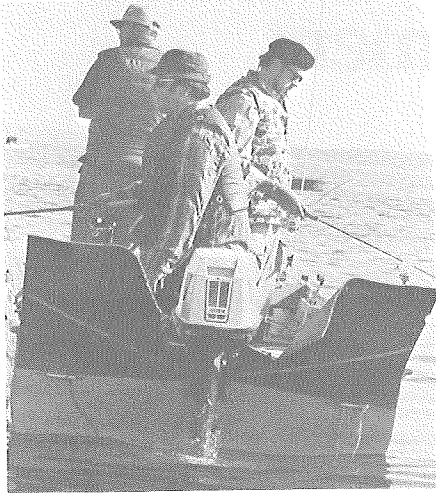
Small Business Depends on Highway 53

Small businesses in the project area rely totally on U.S. 53 for delivery of goods. Their customers use Highway 53 for shopping trips.

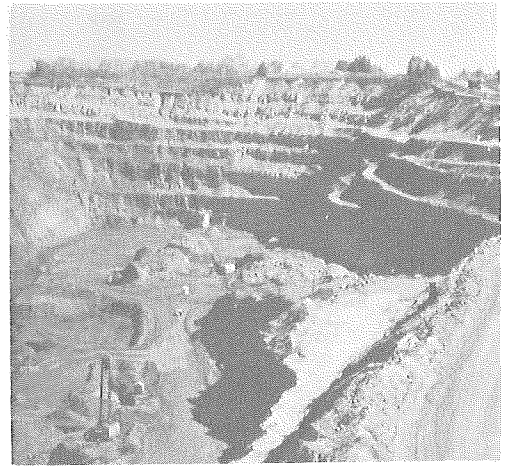
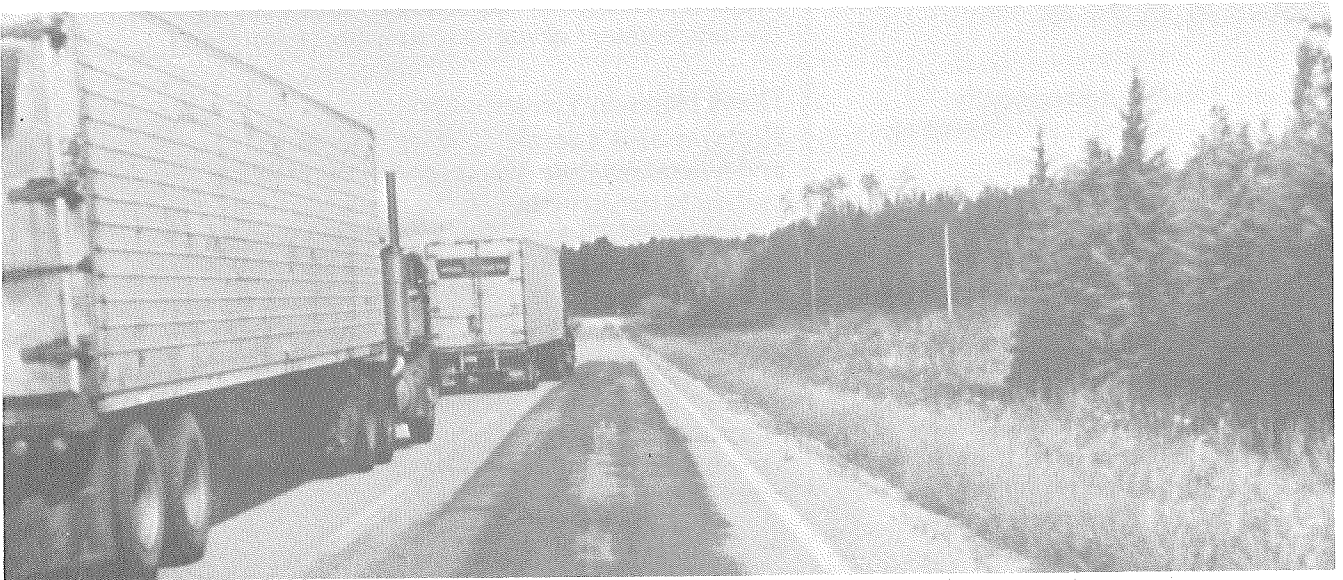
Employment Must be Considered

Economic stimulus and employment opportunities are important considerations in the project area. Increased traffic congestion on U.S. 53 due to slow-moving Voyageurs-bound travelers could adversely affect the transportation of lumber and minerals, hurting these industries. Local merchants could also be hurt if goods can't be delivered promptly and if customers have trouble getting to the markets.

Unemployment is already a concern in this region. Many young people leave the area each year for employment in more populated areas. The unofficial unemployment rate for St. Louis (except Duluth) and Koochiching Counties are 10.6 and 7.1 percent respectively. These compare to the Minnesota unemployment rate of 5.1 percent and the national rate of 6.4 percent. Inadequate transportation could discourage new business in this area and encourage even more young people to leave because there are no job opportunities.



Arrowhead Region Vistor Attractions



School Buses

U.S. 53 is extensively used by school buses for transporting children to and from school. Residential development necessitates a number of bus stops on the highway for loading and unloading children. There are about 250 stops per day in the rural portion of the project where higher national speed limits prevail.

Local Support

Citizens, locally and regionally, have supported the improvement of U.S. 53 to four lanes. Some residents undoubtedly view the increased number of people to the area as an economic opportunity. Others believe the additional traffic will severely inconvenience them and demand a four-lane highway to maintain their status quo.

For whatever their reasons, most local residents support a four-lane highway. Organized groups and local governments have presented 38 resolutions of support. Over 6,000 names have been received petitioning for four lanes.

Improvement Funding

The estimated 1978 cost to improve U.S. 53 to a four-lane highway is \$90 million. This will construct a roadway comparable to the portion of U.S. 53 from Duluth to Virginia.

Many Needs

The need for this major improvement to U.S. 53 occurs simultaneously with needed improvements on other state highways. It is only one of many projects identified as important by many during the development of the state transportation plan.

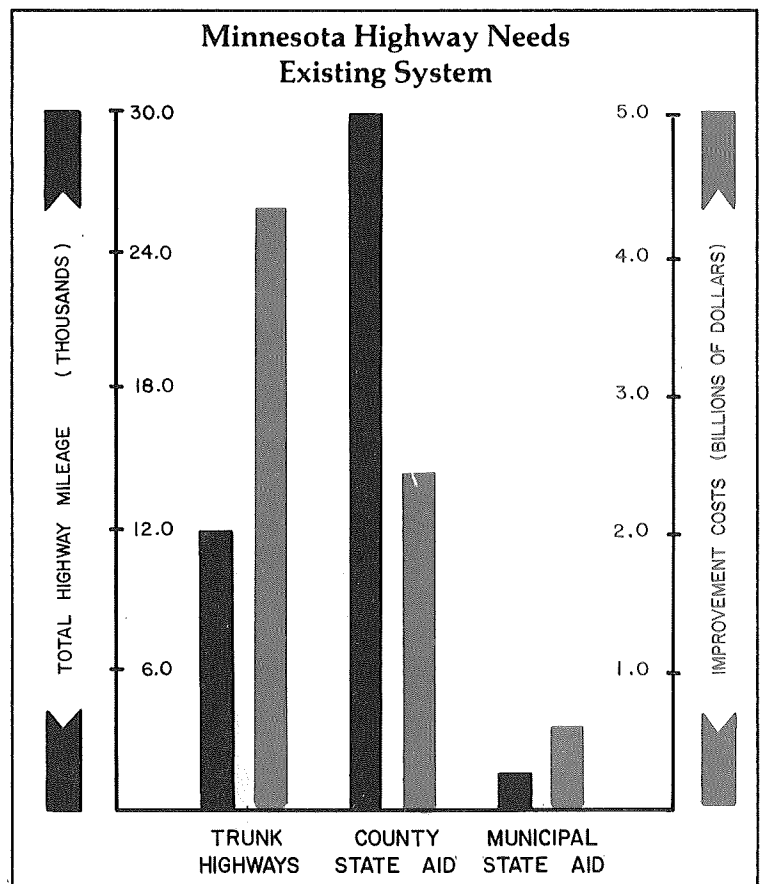
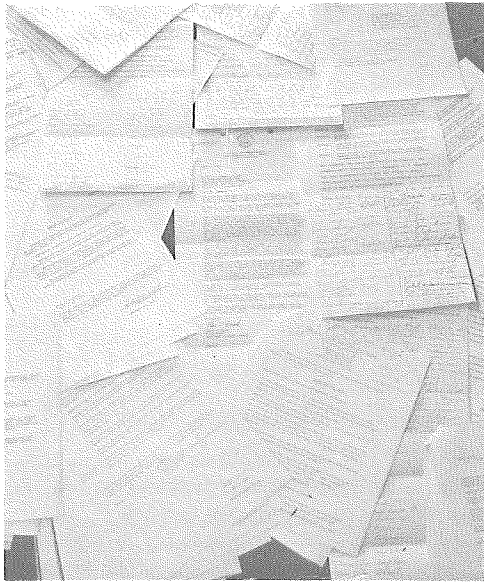
Trunk Highway Construction

Highway 53 is a trunk highway. Combined state and federal revenue sources contributed \$31.8 million to construction on the trunk highway (major highways excluding interstates) system in 1977. Even if this same amount of funding continued to be available, it would take three years' commitment of the *total* available trunk highway funds for the entire state just to improve Highway 53.

Almost 70 percent of the revenues for construction of trunk highways is federal which can only be used if state money is available to provide the other 30 percent.

School Bus Traffic On U.S. 53

SCHOOL DISTRICT	BUSES PER DAY	STOPS PER DAY
INTERNATIONAL FALLS	14	120
ST. LOUIS (COOK & ORR)	30	70
VIRGINIA	12	76



Revenue Projections Gloomy

Revenue projections indicate that by 1983 no state money will be available for matching federal funds in Minnesota. This will end construction if additional revenues are not found.

The major reasons for this funding problem are not manageable by the State of Minnesota. Inflation is reducing the purchasing power of the available funds.

Fuel Efficiency Hurts

The 55 mile per hour speed limit and federally mandated fuel efficient vehicles increase fuel efficiency of automobiles and thereby decrease the amount of gasoline being sold. The merits of these actions are recognized and supported. However, they have reduced the revenue raised per vehicle mile, widening the gap between revenue and needs.

A Unique Situation

Minnesota Remains Committed

While the State of Minnesota remains committed to Voyageurs National Park, it should be noted that this commitment was initiated prior to the present cost-revenue problem and public land was donated before full visitor impact was established. This is not to say the decision would be reversed today. However, safe and convenient access to the park will take a much larger portion of highway revenues than initially planned.

Minnesota's Commitment

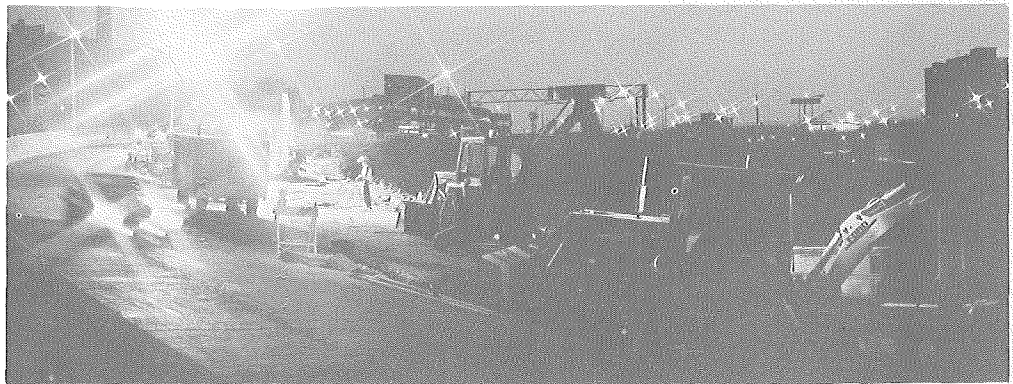
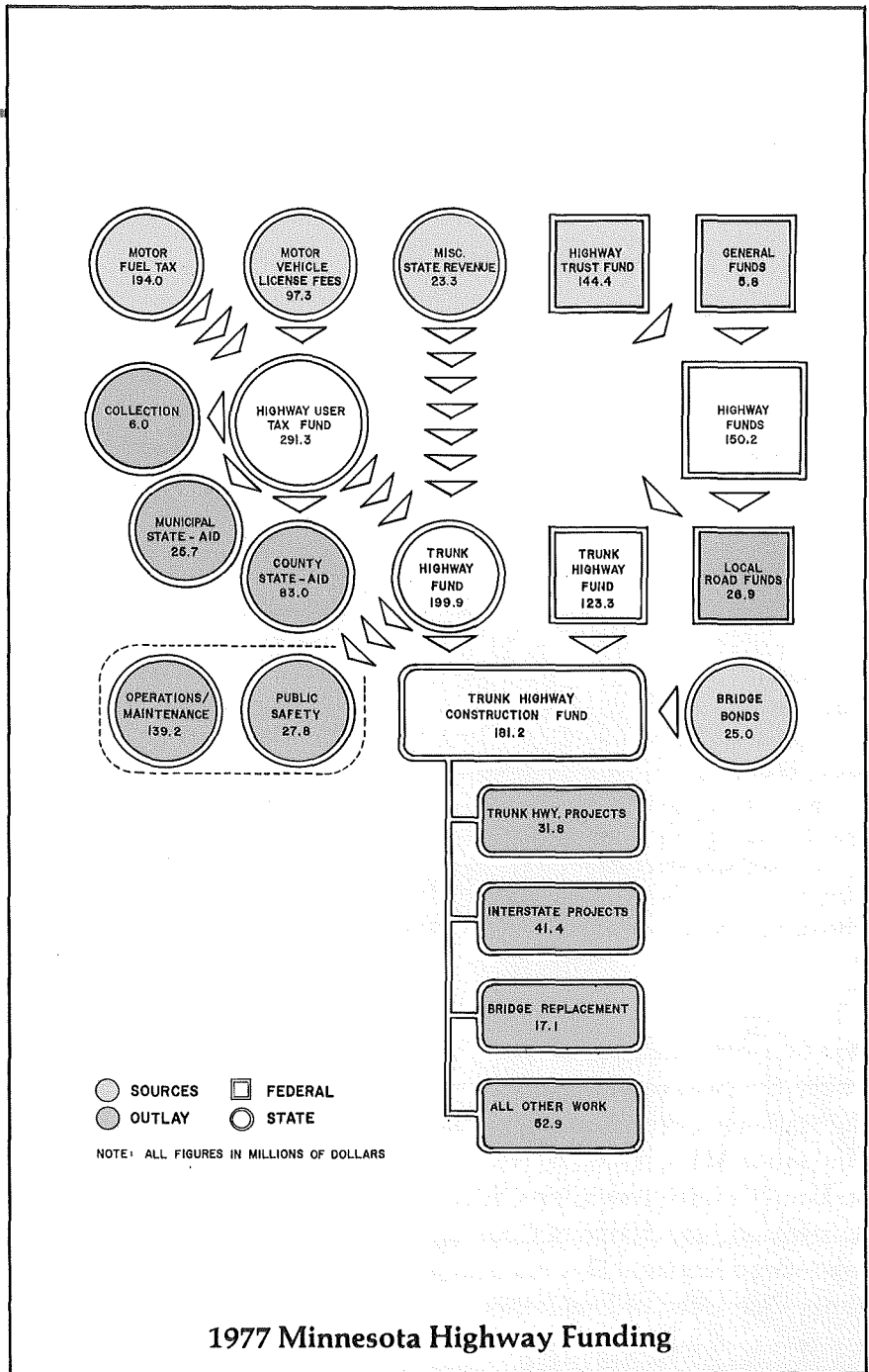
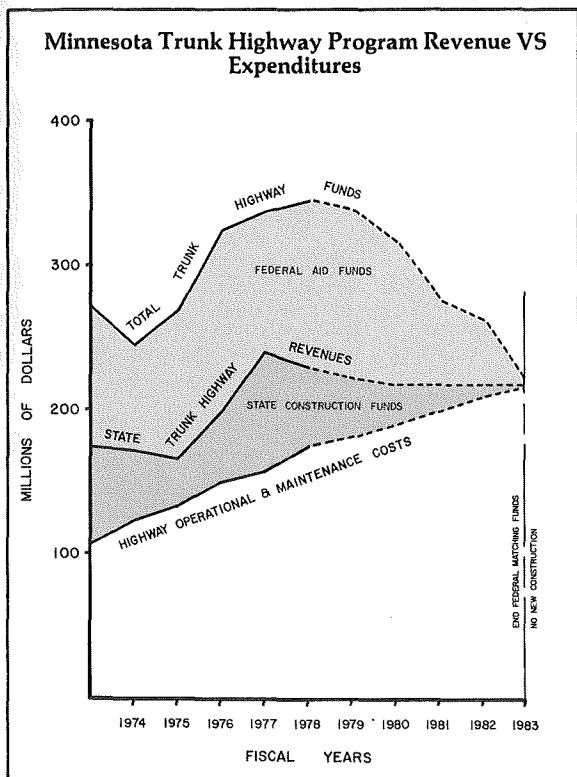
Minnesota has made a financial commitment to Highway 53. It has agreed to maintain the road until improvements are made and will maintain the road after the necessary improvements are made. In fact, \$20 million have been committed to improving the two-lane roadway of Highway 53 over the next three years.

Federal Responsibility

What Minnesota is requesting in this unique situation is that the responsibility for developing adequate access to a federally designated recreation area be assumed by the federal government which designated that area.

We are also asking that the federal government take measures to protect the existing economy of the project region by guaranteeing traditional transportation can be maintained as status quo.

For those reasons, we are asking that the federal government fully finance the needed improvements to Highway 53, the only access to the new Voyageurs National Park.



Resolutions of Support

The following have passed resolutions supporting the need for four-lane reconstruction of U.S. Highway 53 from Virginia to International Falls:

CITIES

Cloquet
Cook
Eveleth
Gilbert
Hoyt Lakes
International Falls
Mountain Iron
Orr
Ranier
South International Falls
Tower
Virginia

COUNTIES

Carlton
Koochiching
St. Louis

CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Biwabik Chamber of Commerce
Crane Lake Commercial Club
Ely Chamber of Commerce
Virginia Chamber of Commerce

OTHERS

Iron Range Building and Construction Trades Council
United Steelworkers Local 1938, Virginia
United Steelworkers Local 4757, Babbitt
Minnesota AFL-CIO
St. Louis County Township Officers Association
Arrowhead Association of Counties
Arrowhead Regional Development Commission
Range Delegation of Legislators
Citizen's Committee on Voyageurs National Park
Minnesota Arrowhead Association
Minnesota Good Roads, Inc.
United Retired Steelworkers - Eastern District

Overstar will seek federal — funds for Voyaguer Road

"With all our forces pushing for the 'missing link,' that of making Highway 33 a four lane thoroughfare between I-35 and Highway 53, enroute to the Voyager National Park, including support from Governor Rudy Perpich, we must avoid accepting anything short of a safety angle and a year around maintenance stand-point. We must have roads with a nine-ton load minimum or better to serve the growing traffic volume which will result from constant use of the dollars for this project?"

Falls, a distance of approximately 100 miles ap- financing. The difference

Less than 4 lanes makes no sense

Letter to Editor...

A lot of support for 4 lanes

Four-lane highway needs federal funds

To the Editor: You concern/ High repr of n F cor we If j

but nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that the following organizations have strongly endorsed such a four-lane highway:

COUNTIES: Koochiching, Saint Louis and Carlton.

CITIES: Int'l. Falls, Cloquet, Cook, Eveleth, Gilbert, Mt. Iron, Virginia, Hoyt Lakes, Orr and Tower.

OTHERS: Citizens Committee on Voyageurs National Park, Biwabik Chamber of Commerce, Ely Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Crane Lake Commercial Club, Iron Range Building and Construction Trades Council, U.S. Steelworkers Local 1938, Virginia, U.S. Steelworkers 4757, Babbitt, Arrowhead Regional Development Comm., Arrowhead Assoc. of Counties, Minnesota AFL-CIO, St. Louis County Township Officers Association, Range Delegation of Legislators, Hospitality and Retail Divisions of the Int'l. Falls Civic and Commerce Association and Timber Produce Association.

These are the people that y continuing to beat the-Falls four-la for hearing the wrong with s I reduce the fe drivers that u s wrong w necessary benefits th long? I should r than w

The only Federal funding way

anyone Highway 53 knows figures don't begin to tell the apparently no consideration was given to the almost ninety (90) no-passing zones, the dangerous curves and hills, the slow-moving pulpwood trucks, the recreational vehicles during the summer months and the hazardous snow and ice conditions

during the winter. Furthermore, how does the Department of Transportation propose to accomodate the projected increase in traffic as the Park approaches is no the th ny ner the of) a In- Now It is rthern on- sible and- ing ems. Your editorial would give the impression that there is not widespread support for a four-lane highway to International Falls,

City council rejects two-lane proposal

By DOUG SMITH
Journal Reporter

The Falls city council rejected the idea of an improved two-lane Highway 53 last night and adopted a resolution supporting the construction of a four-lane highway connecting the Falls with the Iron Range. The council also urged Gov. Rudy Perpich to conduct a public hearing on the matter in the near future as the governor had suggested at a recent meeting in Virginia. The council also invited Commissioner of Transportation Jim Harrington to drive up Highway 53 to the meeting at city

Perpich wants meeting on Hwy. 53 construction

By KEITH CHRISTENSEN

flew to the Falls recently to announce the bid letting dates for

highway to Canada. Anderson cited a number of past studies which recommended a four-lane to handle the extra traffic caused by Voyageurs National Park. "In 1975," he said, "I had a conversation with then-Commissioner of Highways Marzetelli. He told me that to efficiently handle the park traffic, there should be a four-lane highway."

Joe Boyle, went farther. He said that Anderson received a letter from Marzetelli in 1974 which committed the state to widening Hwy. 53 to four lanes. Anderson's bottom line was emphatic. "We have to do it right today so we don't have to come back in another 10 or 15 years," he said.

Anderson introduced evidence v shows that the Falls is the major port entry in Minnesota, more than trip crossings of the next busiest port of He cited Interstate 29 which runs to Canada in North Dakota, just west Minnesota border. "It's interesting that I-29 in North Dakota, a full fo facility, carries less traffic than H 53 in Minnesota," he said.

"In fact," Anderson continued, "at Canadian border crossings western United States, figures fr federal government indicate t international Falls is the major port between the West coast and S Marie—a distance of some 2,000

County seeks four-lane road

in various stages the need for a four-lane highway, the governor said he would make the arrangements to meet in the Falls with Senators Humphrey and

Prepared by the Minnesota Department of Transportation.
For additional information write:

Highway 53
Mn/DOT
Transportation Building
St. Paul, MN 55155



Cover photo courtesy of Minneapolis Tribune