



MN350



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MARCH 2, 2022

Dear Governor Tim Walz, Interim Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger, Division Administrator Wendell Meyer, Chair Charlie Zelle, Rethinking I-94 Corridor Manager Sheila Kauppi, MnDOT Livability Initiative Director Gloria Jeff

CC: Mayor Melvin Carter, Mayor Jacob Frey, Director Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Director Sean Kershaw, Members of the Rethinking I-94 Policy Advisory Committee

The undersigned groups consist of neighborhood organizations, nonprofits and other community stakeholders in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. We work on and engage with a wide array of issues including transportation access, racial justice, health equity, economic opportunity, labor, land use, housing, climate action and environmental justice.

Interstate 94 directly impacts outcomes in these areas for the people that we work with. **We are writing to express support for the Twin Cities Boulevard vision and outline time sensitive demands and benchmarks for the Rethinking I-94 project corridor.**

Built in the 1960's, I-94 destroyed homes and businesses, schools, and connections to the things people valued, all to save suburban commuters a few minutes of driving time. By far the most severe and intentional consequences of this decision by the Minnesota Highway Department (now MnDOT) fell upon the Black, Indigenous and people of color who lived in or near the highway corridor.

60 years later, I-94 continues to harm the residents who live, work and go to school in the neighborhoods that it cuts through:

- Investment and jobs moved to the suburbs, restricting access to living wage employment and everyday needs. Annual household income in the corridor is nearly \$35,000 less than the Twin Cities average
- Air quality within the Rethinking I-94 project corridor is over three times worse than the maximum pollution level deemed safe by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- The rate of asthma hospitalization near I-94 is three times the state average and is double the Hennepin and Ramsey County average

- Life expectancy for a person born along the freeway corridor is 5 years less than the Twin Cities average
- Transportation options are limited, especially for the 28% of households along the freeway who don't have access to a car, a figure that is double the Minneapolis and Saint Paul average
- Transportation is Minnesota's biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions and 94% of the Rethinking I-94 project corridor has been identified as an area of concern for environmental justice by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

MnDOT is now in the process of determining the future of the freeway corridor via its Rethinking I-94 project. This project is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to repair these harms. The Twin Cities Boulevard would transform the highway corridor to put people first and invest racial, economic and environmental justice for surrounding communities. It would continue a growing list of successful highway to boulevard conversions across the country.

The Twin Cities Boulevard vision includes:

- Replacing the I-94 trench between the downtowns of Minneapolis with a surface level, multi-modal boulevard and reconnecting the severed street grid
- Placing the remaining freeway land and adjoining parcels of publicly held land in a community land trust. This land will be used to bring reparative, community guided investment to neighborhoods along the corridor, including housing, businesses and greenspace
- Implementing robust community benchmarks to repair historic and ongoing harms, prevent displacement and benefit existing residents

This vision is rooted in a community-centered planning process that commits to a racial justice frame and restorative approach that intentionally directs economic, social and environmental benefits of highway removal to those who have been most impacted by the repeated infrastructure injustices; Black, low-wealth communities of color along the project corridor.

Our Demands

Immediate:

1. **Include the Twin Cities Boulevard as a project alternative to be evaluated within the upcoming Rethinking I-94 Scoping Decision Document.**

The boulevard should include the following features:

- A surface-level boulevard and restored street grid to reconnect neighborhoods along the entire corridor
- A new, zero-fare rapid transit line with electric buses, dedicated lanes and heated shelters

- Protected bikeways to provide fast and comfortable places for people to bike that connect to neighborhoods along the entire corridor
 - Wide, tree-shaded sidewalks with safe and comfortable crosswalks that implement best practices for people with disabilities
 - Safe and convenient traffic lanes for local drivers and freight traffic
 - Linear park space to be designed by the community
- 2. Amend the Rethinking I-94 Purpose & Need documents to allow for the fair evaluation of a highway-to-boulevard conversion and work with project partners to integrate the outlined policies and benchmarks to prioritize reparative justice for freeway communities along the corridor**

We will continue to organize for the following outcomes:

- 1. The selection of a highway-to-boulevard conversion as the preferred alternative for the Rethinking I-94 project and a commitment to starting construction by 2027**
- 2. The implementation of the outlined community benchmarks and policies within the project corridor.** These will ensure that the benefits of the transformation will prioritize those who have been harmed by I-94 and that displacement and gentrification does not result. This requires leadership and collaboration from all participating agencies, including MnDOT, the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin and Ramsey County, the Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Public Housing Authorities, and federal partners.

These benchmarks include:

- Placing reclaimed freeway land and adjoining parcels of publicly owned land in a publicly held land trust that encompasses the entire project corridor
- Establishing a commercial land trust to prioritize opportunities for local BIPOC entrepreneurs and business owners
- Create a local business support fund to support existing businesses throughout the construction process
- Implement robust anti-displacement policies within the corridor, including rent control, TOPA, “right-to-cure”, inclusionary zoning and a rental assistance fund.
- Setting clear goals for inclusive hiring and project labor hours, prioritizing people from surrounding neighborhoods, people of color, women and people with a physical and/or cognitive disability
- A transparent and accessible planning process with clear benchmarks for public engagement and community consent

The full list of community benchmarks and policies can be found at twincitiesboulevard.org.

There is a clear and urgent need for the outlined changes. We ask MnDOT and project partners to take immediate action to implement a reparative vision for the I-94 corridor. **Until the outlined demands are met and the community receives a public commitment to this vision, we will continue to organize and engage the community.**

Signed,

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