

# Transportation Policy – Highway Issues

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### Scope, geography and authority of the discussion

Highways are a core component of the regional transportation system defined in the Metropolitan Land Planning Act. *Thrive* and the highway policies and strategies in the Transportation Policy Plan focus on the Regional Highway System, which includes:

- **Principal arterials**, which account for only 4 percent of the region’s roadways but carry 52 percent of vehicle miles traveled in the region. Most are freeways or expressways, but a few, especially in the rural area, are two-lane roads. MnDOT has ownership and jurisdiction over most principal arterials.
- **A-minor arterials**, which account for 11 percent of the region’s roadways and 22 percent of the regional miles traveled. 70 percent of these highways are county roads.

The region spends most of its federal highway funds on principal and A-minor arterials. The region’s other roadways provide local land access and typically do not receive federal funding.

The Metropolitan Council and its Transportation Advisory Board serve as the region’s federally-required Metropolitan Planning Organization responsible for a preparing a long-range Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) and programming federal transportation funds for the region. Under federal law the Transportation Policy Plan must be updated at least every four years.

Today’s issues are strongly connected to future *Thrive* discussions on:

- Transit investment;
- Geographic Planning Areas; and
- Economic competitiveness (including freight).

### Existing policy direction

Policy 2 of the [Regional Development Framework](#) states, “Plan and invest in multimodal transportation choices, based on the full range of costs and benefits, to slow the growth of congestion and serve the region’s economic needs.” Additionally, the Framework calls for eliminating bottlenecks and investing in selected capacity improvements, including the completion of a six-lane beltway – specific strategies from the 2001 Transportation Policy Plan.

Since the 2004 adoption of the *Framework*, the Council has adopted three updated regional Transportation Policy Plans, most recently in November 2010. The [2010 Transportation Policy Plan](#) focuses on transportation investments that:

- Preserve, manage and optimize the capacity of the existing highway system;
- Provide for transit preservation and improvements;
- Offer modal choices.

The [2010 Transportation Policy Plan](#) emphasizes a different set of highway investment priorities for the region. Several trends led to this new approach:

- A broad acceptance that resources invested in additional general purpose highway lanes cannot fix congestion;
- Higher levels of investment needed to preserve aging roads and bridges – a need vividly emphasized by the collapse of the I-35W bridge;
- Revenue sources not keeping up with construction costs.

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The [2010 Transportation Policy Plan](#) identifies the following priorities for investments in highway capacity after system preservation needs are met:

- Use Active Traffic Management technologies and techniques to move more people and vehicles;
- Construct lower-cost/high-benefit safety and capacity projects throughout the region;
- Expand the regional system of managed (priced) lanes to provide a congestion-free option for those using transit, sharing rides, or willing to pay;
- Strategically enhance capacity.

Within these priorities, there is an additional emphasis on projects that enhance transit, and leverage preservation projects with lower-cost/high benefit investments. For example, the preservation project reconstructing the I-35E Cayuga bridge will also create a managed lane for congestion-free travel for transit, carpools and those willing to pay.

## Emerging tensions

Since the adoption of the [2010 Transportation Policy Plan](#), demand continues for capacity projects to relieve congestion and to serve growing suburban and exurban areas. Projects in the 2010 Transportation Policy Plan are anticipated to cost \$4 billion over 20 years compared to the \$900 million available for capacity improvement. Moreover, the most recent revision to the [Minnesota State Highway Investment Plan](#) (MnSHIP) shows that the region will have only \$56 million available annually from 2014 to 2022 for mobility improvements; from 2023 onward, all of MnDOT's funding will be devoted to preservation of the existing system. With these limited fiscal resources, smart highway capacity investments across the region must take a system-wide approach and create alternatives to congestion rather than focusing on project-by-project investments that often simply move the congestion point "down the road".

## Questions for discussion

- A. How specifically should *Thrive* express the highway capacity investment strategy? Options:
  - Leave the highway capacity investment strategy for in the Transportation Policy Plan (i.e., not in *Thrive*); OR
  - Incorporate a specific highway capacity investment strategy focusing on preservation and optimizing existing capacity into both *Thrive* and the Transportation Policy Plan, realizing that being too specific could make *Thrive* out-of-date with a 2018 update of the Transportation Policy Plan.
- B. What priorities should *Thrive* and the next Transportation Policy Plan set for highway capacity improvements after system preservation needs are met? Recommendation:
  - Endorse a smart capacity investment approach:
    - Active Traffic Management technology;
    - Lower-cost/high-benefit safety and capacity improvements;
    - Managed and priced highway lanes to expand capacity;
    - Strategic capacity enhancements.
- C. What expectations should *Thrive* and the Council set around the availability of highway capacity improvements to support growth on the developing edge? Options:
  - Discourage growth in areas not well-served by highways; OR
  - Allow growth but without expectation of future highway capacity improvements funded by federal and state highway resources; AND Focus growth along corridors with potential for future transit investment.