



April 27, 2012

Dear Members of the Minnesota House and Senate,

Highway congestion during peak traffic times is an ongoing and seemingly intractable problem in the Twin Cities and across the nation. Only a few tools exist to help relieve congestion. Expanding the lanes of traffic on a highway is clearly one tool that helps. Congestion pricing through high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes—lanes where drivers pay a voluntary fee that varies with congestion levels to guarantee their access to a free flowing lane of traffic—is another tool. Both tools are essential to relieving traffic congestion in America.

We believe that the MnPASS HOT lanes proposed to be included in the I-35E corridor upgrades would be a cost-effective tool to relieve congestion along the corridor. These dedicated lanes create space for bus transit, car poolers, and single-occupancy vehicle drivers willing to pay for free flowing traffic. On top of creating a free flowing lane for these users, studies show that HOT lanes relieve congestion for the general purpose lanes as well. Thus, everyone benefits.

Some people may call the fees charged for the use of HOT lanes a tax. But unlike taxation, no one is forced to pay the extra fee to use the HOT lane. Drivers using the regular lanes are still able to use those lanes—which are, importantly, less congested lanes—at no charge beyond the current level of taxation. Instead of a tax, the voluntary HOT lane fee is actually a mechanism to manage congestion for all users.

Even where brand-new HOT lanes are created using general transportation tax dollars, as is the case in the I-35E corridor, the issue isn't whether a new tax is being applied. The same taxation scheme on the general public is in place. The issue is whether current taxes are being used to fund something worthwhile.

We believe the I-35E corridor MnPASS HOT lane upgrades are indeed worthwhile. In fact, we believe the voluntary fees charged to users of the HOT lane will manage traffic in way that relieves the pressure to raise transportation taxes on Minnesotans in the future.

Sincerely,

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