

Interstate 94 Initial Alternatives - Frequently Asked Questions

Union Park District Council Transportation Committee - October 26, 2023

- 1) **What can I do to improve or prevent adoption of these options?** Although the entire process is years long, MnDOT will soon make big picture decisions that will dramatically limit what will be studied and ultimately built. You and your neighbors can influence what MnDOT designs and builds - but you need to act soon!
 - a) **Take the [MnDOT Rethinking I-94 Alternatives Survey](#) by October 31** and make your voice heard on each of the proposed options. You may suggest new features on specific alternatives or reject every one and ask for entirely new options.
 - b) Citizen lobbying: contact your elected and appointed representatives at the city, regional (Metropolitan Council) and state (legislators and governor) levels.
 - c) Stay active by taking part in the Union Park District Council - it has an official advisory role to Saint Paul's Mayor and City Council
 - d) Join or volunteer for an advocacy organization that's working on the I-94 project
- 2) **What's wrong with the highway?** "Rethinking I-94" is a process initiated by and being carried out by MnDOT. I-94 between downtown Saint Paul and downtown Minneapolis opened in 1968 and is now at the end of its structural life.
- 3) **Why are we talking about changing or getting rid of it?** The highway has become part of our lives, but people who spend time near I-94 are harmed by air emissions from tires, brake wear and tail pipes; noise pollution from tires and engines; and the highway's effects on local traffic and pedestrian/bicycle safety. Harms also include decades of social and economic disconnection and well known racial disparity impacts. People around the world are debating whether highways even belong within cities and today, highway removal is more common.

In addition, The cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Hennepin County, and MnDOT have all set goals to significantly reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and use of personal vehicles.

- a) I-94 causes air and noise [pollution](#) and [significant health disparities](#)
- b) Transportation is [Minnesota's biggest contributor to the climate crisis](#)
- c) I-94's pavement worsens [extreme heat](#)
- d) Highways [make traffic congestion worse](#)

- 4) **What about the Rondo Land Bridge?** MnDOT is working with Reconnect Rondo to study a land bridge option over 3-5 blocks of highway in the Rondo neighborhood. Any of the current proposed highway alternatives could be designed to function with a five-block land bridge in the Rondo Neighborhood. A land bridge in any neighborhood other than Rondo is not currently being considered by MnDOT.
- 5) **Would adding more lanes to the highway make it easier for the drivers in our neighborhood to get around faster?** Evidence has shown that when lanes are added, traffic ultimately increases—a phenomenon known as “induced demand.” Initially faster travel times and increased convenience encourage **more** driving, and traffic and congestion get worse.
- 6) **If the highway is converted to a surface road/boulevard or if lanes are removed, where would the traffic go?** When lanes or roadways are removed or reduced, drivers adjust their travel behaviors and some of the traffic will “disappear” as people decide to make trips differently or not at all. This observed effect is known as “traffic evaporation” or “[reduced demand](#).” In the long run, people may change where they live and work. The traffic evaporation effect is more pronounced when combined with improvements to transit, cycling or neighborhood development that make non-driving options more attractive and convenient.
- 7) **What about [specific street, intersection, sidewalk, sound wall or part of the highway, etc.]?** At this stage, MnDOT’s proposed alternatives only deal with the big picture.
- 8) **What will various highway options cost Saint Paul taxpayers?** The costs for redesigning and updating the highway are primarily paid by federal funding with a state-funded match. Saint Paul taxpayers will not shoulder the expense of any of the alternative visions alone.
- 9) **Who pays if we convert the highway to a surface street/boulevard?** If the highway is removed, but a federal-aid highway (which includes most roads other than local or minor collectors) remains, federal funding can be used for construction and maintenance of the new roadway infrastructure. The federal National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) and Surface Transportation Block Grants (STBG) which make up MnDOT’s two largest federal highway funding sources are very flexible; meaning states have power over where to allocate the funds within their jurisdictions. Whether I-94 remains a limited access highway or becomes a fully-reconnected boulevard, the state can pay for a new transportation corridor with federal funding.
- 10) **Who pays for land bridges, caps, or decks over highways?** Federal highway funds can be used to pay for land bridges, caps, or decks over eligible roadways. Most non-transportation amenities built *on top* of highway caps are not eligible for federal transportation funds.

- 11) **How do the options affect noise?** We do not know the noise implications of any of the MnDOT alternatives. We do know that most vehicle noise comes from tires, which vehicle electrification does not improve. Those of us who live near the highway know that compression braking (“Jake braking”), after-market exhaust system noise-makers and rapid acceleration/deceleration are especially loud. It is fair to expect that the proposed options that reduce overall travel lanes and/or reduce speeds will result in markedly decreased noise.
- 12) **How do the options affect traffic on my street?** Local traffic modeling has not been made available by MnDOT. We know from experience that the sudden loss of multi-lane highways could result in short-term increases in traffic. Long-term, traffic should not increase. Drivers find different routes, they begin to use transit or carpool, they chain trips together and make fewer trips, or they decide to forgo certain trips. On the other hand, newly added lanes and additional capacity may reduce congestion for a year or two, but experience shows that congestion will return shortly thereafter and it often gets worse.
- 13) **Will I still have easy driving access from my house to the highway?** We don’t yet know which vehicle entrance or exit ramps would be added or removed in any of the options.
- 14) **Will I be able to catch a bus or train in the I-94 corridor?** MnDOT is not currently considering rail transit in the corridor. Express bus service is planned to continue in certain alternatives. Buses in dedicated lanes or in shoulder-running bus lanes are included in some options. However, it appears that any new bus service in the corridor would serve only one or two major neighborhood stops such as Snelling Ave. Keep in mind that [new bus rapid transit service](#) will be available on Marshall and Selby Avenues starting in summer, 2025.
- 15) **If they remove the highway, won’t homes facing the corridor be impacted by new commercial and multi-unit housing developments?** Options #4 and 5 (remove the highway) and Options #6 and 7 (local-regional and reduced highway) might free up former highway land for commercial, residential or recreational development. MnDOT currently owns the land, and the redevelopment process would be long and complex. Saint Paul could seek to purchase and rezone properties no longer needed for a highway. Advocates are presenting ideas on keeping the land in a community-controlled trust so gentrification and displacement is avoided. There is always significant public engagement before development decisions are made.
- 16) **Won’t electric vehicles solve the highway’s pollution problems?** While electric vehicles reduce fossil fuel-related pollution, they still generate tiny particulate pollution from their tires and brakes which can enter human lungs, waterways, and also harm fish and other aquatic life. These “microplastics” are a serious and growing problem.
- 17) **What about truck traffic and freight?** All of the options need to consider the truck and freight traffic that impacts our neighborhood and neighborhood businesses. Where would

it go? Are there alternate routes for freight? Could it be routed through a new tunnel under the corridor? Analysis must be carried out with attention paid to safety, noise, and pollution as well as economic outcomes.

18) What about regional rail service? Some advocates are proposing that regional rail service be routed through the I-94 corridor. MnDOT is not currently considering this option.

19) Don't state agencies like MnDOT typically get what they want? They often do but things have changed since the 1950s and '60s when this highway was built. There are federal requirements for public engagement and environmental analysis and today, cities have more power in decision-making over projects within their boundaries.

20) As the population grows, won't congestion get worse? Surprisingly, traffic volume on I-94 has changed very little over the past 10-20 years, and has declined post pandemic.