



November 25, 2024

Melvin Carter, Mayor
Anika Bowie, Councilmember, Ward 1
Rebecca Noecker, Councilmember, Ward 2
Saura Jost, Councilmember, Ward 3
Mitra Jalali, Council president, Ward 4
HwaJeong Kim, Councilmember, Ward 5
Nelsie Yang, Councilmember, Ward 6
Cheniqua Johnson, Councilmember, Ward 7

Re: The Union Park District Council (UPDC) board urges the City of Saint Paul Paul to communicate its priorities to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) regarding the Rethinking I-94 project

Dear Mayor Carter and Saint Paul City Council members:

In 2020 and 2021, respectively, Minneapolis and Saint Paul passed resolutions outlining high-level goals for the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Rethinking I-94 project. MnDOT's Purpose and Need Statements for the project reflect neither city nor community preferences. Instead, MnDOT continues to study options to widen the highway, which residents of both cities oppose.

On September 19, 2024, the Minneapolis City Council unanimously passed a four-page resolution (202AR-292) establishing its priorities for Rethinking I-94. Mayor Jacob Frey signed the resolution on September 26, 2024. So far, the City of Saint Paul has taken no additional action. Union Park District Council (UPDC) believes now is an important time for the City of Saint Paul to adopt its own updated I-94 resolution.

The time is now: MnDOT continues to gather public input and analyze the 10 highway alternatives that it presented to the public in July 2023. The agency anticipates that in the spring of 2025, it will select a small number of alternatives for final study and full environmental review.

Because Rethinking I-94 will likely be one of the largest construction projects in the coming decades, it is relevant to the City of Saint Paul as a whole. It also sets the tone for reconstruction projects on other corridors and bridges that MnDOT owns within Saint Paul. In addition, large state reconstruction projects often require city matching dollars for “upgrades” beyond what MnDOT agrees to fund, and thus this project will affect the overall city budget and taxpayer burdens.

UPDC, along with many other neighborhood organizations, has gone on record several times in favor of a community-based and environmentally focused plan for the Rethinking I-94 project that adequately and equitably addresses the highway’s current and past harms. While today’s Union Park neighborhood did not suffer the level of harm experienced by the Rondo neighborhood, Union Park was dramatically changed for the worse when I-94 was constructed, and the impacts continue today. An article in Streets.mn explains the impact of I-94 in Union Park: [I-94 in the Union Park District: A History of Prioritizing Speed Over Community - Streets.mn](#)

As it considers a new resolution regarding the I-94 project, we hope the City of Saint Paul will reemphasize language from your 2021 resolution, include language from the Minneapolis resolution (September 2024) and incorporate new information.

Specifically, we ask you to include:

- Reference to historical community, economic and social harms.
- Racial equity impacts that include discriminatory redlining.
- Loss of community cohesion and connections when I-94 was constructed, which still impact neighborhoods today — including those that UPDC represents.
- Greatly reduced and obstructed street network for local travel by vehicles, bicycle, transit and walking, resulting in more travel by private motor vehicles and impeded access to local destinations.
- Environmental and health harms caused by air and noise pollution.
- Current city goals and plans for economic development, transportation and mitigating climate change.
- New conditions including remote work and transit infrastructure and plans.
- The 45-page letter that over 20 community groups, including UPDC, signed and sent to MnDOT (attached) in October 2021.

- The report by Our Streets and its national consultants about reparative highway alternatives (Twin Cities Boulevard), regional traffic modeling and more.
- The study and planning work of Reconnect Rondo, including freeway caps, plus the video from MnDOT about the highway cap in Denver.
- Current understanding of induced demand and traffic evaporation.
- Highway removal/conversion projects in other areas, including the funded and planned highway-to-boulevard project in Syracuse, New York, which is featured in a video presentation from MnDOT.
- The model of Vancouver, British Columbia, which has no highway within city limits.
- Tax-base considerations and economic development opportunities along the corridor and within downtown Saint Paul.
- The need for the Metropolitan Council to adopt and utilize a better regional travel model.
- The City of Saint Paul's stated opposition to the expansion of I-94, including additional lanes for transit and high-occupancy vehicles. (Resolution 21-164 adopted in February 2021)
- Support for the inclusion of a cap and a highway-to-boulevard option as selected alternatives by MnDOT for final study and Environmental Impact Statement.

This project is critical to the City of Saint Paul. Will the work on Interstate 94 further damage community connections, continue to harm public health, contribute to our alarming rate of climate change and damage Saint Paul's economy — or can it be a new start for the city, a national model for community restoration and vitality?

The Union Park District Council's board and its Transportation Committee urge you to be forward-thinking leaders and communicate a vision for the I-94 project that prioritizes health for residents, our warming planet and the local economy.

Sincerely,

Union Park District Council