

Draft letter to: Mayor Carter, all city council members

Requesting that the City of Saint Paul communicate the city's 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, Minneapolis and Saint Paul respectively passed resolutions outlining high-level goals for MnDOT'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 both cities opposed.

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

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.

Union Park District Council asks the City of Saint Paul to pass a resolution outlining the city's priorities regarding MnDOT's Rethinking I-94 project.

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 owned by MnDOT within Saint Paul. In addition, large state reconstruction projects often require city matching dollars for "upgrades" beyond what MnDOT agrees to fund, and will affect the overall city budget and taxpayer burdens.

There is specific language in Saint Paul's resolution from 2021 that should be reemphasized. We ask that the city also look to the September 2024 Minneapolis resolution for important new language that should be included.

Union Park District Council (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.

These important ideas should be specifically considered and included in a Saint Paul resolution:

- 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 impacts 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).
- The report by Our Streets and its national consultants about reparative highway alternatives, 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 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 opportunities along the corridor and within downtown Saint Paul.
- The need for the Metropolitan Council to purchase a better regional travel model.
- Saint Paul's opposition to the expansion of I-94, including additional lanes for transit and high occupancy vehicles.

- Support for the inclusion of a cap and a highway-to-boulevard option as selected alternatives by MnDOT for final study and Environmental Review.