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The Minnesota Policy Blueprint

**TRANSPORTATION POLICY PAPER:  
FOCUS ON MORE ON ROADS AND BRIDGES AND SUSPEND NEW LIGHT RAIL,**

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"Congestion, bumpy roads and empty trains can be avoided  
with the right policies and the right priorities."  
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Sartell, MN -- Saying that a world-class transportation system will provide "a foundation for economic prosperity and personal fulfillment for all Minnesotans," the Minneapolis-based Center of the American Experiment today outlined a legislative agenda for transportation that called for a renewed emphasis on funding to build and maintain roads and bridges and advocates for a moratorium on future light rail projects to better understand the impact of these projects.

The report was released at an event hosted by the St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce on the Sartell campus on the College of St. Scholastica. The recommendations represent the first of what will be 10 issue-related events over summer and early fall to introduce ideas that will ultimately comprise chapters in *The Minnesota Policy Blueprint: Prescription for Prosperity*, a book that will be published by the Center in December.

The transportation paper was written by Fritz Knaak and Amy Roberts. Knaak is a Twin Cities attorney and former state senator; Roberts, a veteran legislative policy specialist, is vice president and general counsel at Connolly Kuhl Group.

Center executives have emphasized that these policy papers will not be traditional "academic" white papers. "Our recommendations are designed to engage and appeal to broad public sensibilities," said Chuck Spevacek, the Center board member who introduced the project publicly in June. "Most important, the recommendations will not merely just 'admire' problems, but will identify and drive practical, deliverable policy solutions."

Spevacek said that the recommendations are focused on helping policymakers at all levels advance ideas to create a culture of prosperity in which all Minnesotans achieve a rich and fulfilling life by allowing the private sector to create high quality jobs across the state. Thematically, Spevacek said, the papers will emphasize opportunity, value in government, innovation, and a full appreciation of the job-creating power of entrepreneurs.

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## **Transportation policy recommendations**

Knaak and Roberts note “efficient road traffic fuels Minnesota’s economic engine and is essential to job creation and improving quality of life for all Minnesotans,” yet state priorities appear to be skewed in favor of driving a political agenda of expensive, underutilized light rail transit projects at the expense of mitigating traffic congestion or maintaining road quality.

Priorities have also been misplaced on focusing too much on transit at the expense of other forms of transportation, the paper said.

Policy makers, it said “remain stubbornly committed to rail transit, despite the fact that rail transit is extraordinarily expensive, time consuming to ride, and set on a fixed track that cannot flexibly connect people to jobs,” it said. “Instead of connecting transit to where people live and work, the Met Council appears focused on steering people into higher density housing along light rail corridors. The \$1.7 billion price tag for the Southwest LRT would be better spent on improving the bus system. This would more effectively connect people to jobs and other important destinations. And by the way, \$1.7 billion is three times more than what MnDOT plans to spend on congestion relief over the next 10 years.”

Among their list of recommendations is a moratorium on future light rail projects until more evidence regarding LRT’s impact can be gathered and assessed. “The development of light rail is coming with a very expensive price tag but without sufficiently proven results,” the paper said. “By allowing evidence to develop, Minnesota will be in a better position to make informed decisions regarding current transit and future transportation needs and how to best address the growing congestion and road quality concerns the state currently faces.”

The authors suggest broadening the state’s transportation funding focus to include more flexible and less costly options, such as bus rapid transit.

Other recommendations include the following.

### **Invest the funding necessary to maintain and improve Minnesota’s transportation system**

- Convert the Counties Transit Improvement Board to the Counties Transportation Improvement Board and expand its authority to fund road projects to be better able to address congestion issues.
- Dedicate a portion of the existing statewide sales and use tax proceeds to fund road and bridge maintenance and expansion.

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- Set aside a larger portion of state bonding for maintenance and congestion relief projects for local roads and bridges.
- Revise Minnesota law to enable implementation of a public-private partnership (3P) pilot program and determine which state transportation projects and programs could be more efficiently and affordably delivered using the 3P model.

### **Reduce traffic congestion for commuters and commerce**

- Set a goal to reduce the miles of congested roadway in the Twin Cities by 20 percent in 10 years.
  - Require MnDOT to create a congestion relief action plan to meet the goal.

### **Enhance the existing freight network across Minnesota**

- Update the boundaries of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's regional districts and empower those districts to select project and funding priorities on regional road and bridge projects essential to statewide economic development.

### **About the 2014 Minnesota Policy Blueprint: Prescription for Prosperity**

[The 2014 Minnesota Policy Blueprint: Prescription for Prosperity](#) is a series of policy recommendations that mirror the Center of the American Experiment's long-held commitment to help elected officials enact policies that promote a culture of prosperity that includes a whole array of benefits that help all Minnesotans achieve a rich and fulfilling life.

### **About the Center of the American Experiment**

The Center of the American Experiment is a nonpartisan, tax-exempt, public policy and educational institution that brings conservative and free market ideas to bear on the hardest problems facing Minnesota and the nation. The Center's mission is building a culture of prosperity in Minnesota and the nation.

To learn more please visit [americanexperiment.org](http://americanexperiment.org)

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