



**DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION**

Testimony of

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Minnesota Department of Transportation

**Transportation Investments for
Solving the Climate Crisis**

Before the
House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis

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Introduction

Chair Castor (D-FL), Ranking Member Graves (R-LA), and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding transportation and climate action in Minnesota.

My name is Margaret Anderson Kelliher and I am honored to serve as Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Climate change is already impacting Minnesota – from our wildlife and plants to our people, waters, historic resources, outdoor recreation areas, and infrastructure. Minnesota is getting warmer and wetter, and we are projected to be one of the states most impacted by climate change in the future.

According to the Minnesota State Climatology Office, average temperatures have increased by nearly three degrees Fahrenheit statewide. Our winter temperatures are warming even faster, resulting in fewer nights of extreme cold. These changes have real, costly impacts, such as increasing maintenance needs to address more dangerous ice on our roads and less time for freight operators to transport heavy loads, since highways are strongest during the cold winter months.

Extreme heat events are also a major safety problem – during the recent extreme heat just a few weeks ago, we saw *at least 43 incidents* of pavements buckling or exploding.

Minnesota is also experiencing more damaging rains, including a *65% increase* in the number of three-inch rain events and the frequency of mega rain events: widespread rains over six inches that are now *four times more frequent* than in the three decades prior. Heavy precipitation directly causes flooding that closes and damages roads and bridges; disrupts travel and commerce; creates slope and embankments failures from saturated soils, and can lead to debris flows that block or damage culverts and bridges and, in some cases, literally wash away roads and bridges.

We also know that climate change does not impact all communities equally. Low-income people and those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color are most likely to be negatively impacted despite often contributing the least to carbon pollution.

Resilience

MnDOT has dedicated resources to understanding current and future climate change in our state and working to make the system more resilient in a way that centers equity and public health.

In particular, we are working to develop a Statewide Extreme Flood Vulnerability Analysis tool to improve local, downscaled data and processes for evaluating future flood risks to our bridges, large culverts, and pipes – and then make better, data-informed decisions about projects based on the likelihood and magnitude of climate risks and criticality of different roadways – factors such as evacuation routes, access to medical services, freight needs, and detour length.

Mitigation

State departments of transportation are the primary agencies responsible for transportation planning and programming and we believe it is our responsibility to lead in reducing transportation carbon pollution. Like the US as a whole, transportation is the number one source of carbon pollution in Minnesota.

- In 2017, MnDOT adopted greenhouse gas emission reduction goals for the transportation sector to align with statewide goals.
- In 2019, we launched a project called *Pathways to Decarbonizing Transportation* that engaged citizens and businesses. This effort resulted in the state pursuing low- and zero-emissions vehicle standards, creating incentives for electric vehicles, including climate change in the environmental review process, and supported development of low carbon biofuels.
- And in 2020, we created the *Sustainable Transportation Advisory Council* – a group of public, private, nonprofit, and citizen leaders and elected officials to advise the agency on strategies to reduce carbon pollution, promote economic development, and support equity.

We believe that this type of ongoing partnership between the public and private sector can be a model to help avoid the most catastrophic consequences of climate change. This advisory council is helping MnDOT lead the way on several initiatives, including setting a goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled, promoting electric vehicles and EV charging, re-evaluating our approaches to congestion, and de-prioritizing adding lane capacity, which can not only induce demand but also adds new costs to our woefully-underfunded system.

Federal Action

Minnesota is not currently on track to achieve our greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. MnDOT is working hard to change that, but federal support and partnership is needed – which is why we are encouraged by proposals in the INVEST in America Act proposed by the House.

- In 2016, MnDOT led a multi-state effort to encourage the Federal Highway Administration to modernize performance measures to include reporting greenhouse gas emissions and are encouraged to see similar reporting reconsidered now. While some agencies have developed the internal capacity for this type of reporting, it will be new to others. We encourage federal technical and financial support for states to whom this is new and recommend financial incentives rather than penalties as states develop this capacity.
- Modernizing federal climate risk standards and tools is also critical as these directly impact state and local transportation investments. The proposed new pre-disaster mitigation program would provide much needed investment for this national issue. We also encourage updating the federal flood risk standard to shift from the 100-year, or 1%, risk to focus on the number of feet above the base flood, updating the 100-year flood risk more regularly,

and estimating the future 100-year flood risk level for the future. We need improved data and tools beyond Atlas-14 that are downscaled, consistently updated, and actionable.

- Electric vehicle charging, transit, and infrastructure for people walking and biking are critical to meeting our climate goals. Minnesota welcomes new federal EV infrastructure investment to expand our network of charging stations in a way that benefits the electric grid and electricity rate payers to ensure benefits of EVs are widespread and support climate and equity goals for transportation and electricity generation.
- EVs alone will not provide the carbon reduction needed or address the inequities of our current transportation system that requires people to own a personal vehicle to have convenient and affordable access to jobs, worship, education, and recreation. We support increases in safe and frequent transit service, infrastructure and non-infrastructure funding for biking and walking, and consideration of broadband as transportation infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the potential for internet access to reduce and shift travel patterns.
- Finally, we encourage federal investment in improving the accuracy of travel demand modeling to ensure more accurate travel forecasts and better understanding of investment impacts. These tools will help projects achieve performance targets and make cost effective, sustainable decisions in place of general-purpose lane expansion.

Madam Chair and Members, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. Future generations are relying on us to make important decisions today to seriously address climate change and transportation.

I would be happy to answer any questions.