

Thank you for that warm introduction. It is a pleasure to be here on a beautiful Friday afternoon – I just came from touring a family farm in Dakota County. Nothing like a 45-minute drive during rush hour to inspire me to talk about smart growth.

It’s a good thing you’re all here, because we need a plan and we need action now before this congestion gets worse – you know its only going to get worse. This – today – is the best its ever going to be and its not good enough.

I look out at this crowd and am pleased to see a broad coalition sitting together. Everybody has finally stopped fighting each other and decided to get something done to make the metropolitan region and the state a better place to live.

Let me just ask a question - How many of you have been working on these issues for so long you’ve forgotten when you started?

Well, so have I – as a mayor, as a traveler all over the country and world and as Governor – I have seen the difference between “smart growth” and “shortsighted growth.” Notice I did not say smart and stupid. I said smart and shortsighted. I want to work together with you. Like you, I want to stop talking and start taking action.

In February, I gave my first state of the state speech to the people of Minnesota and to the Legislature. In that speech I said I wanted to ride a train by the year 2001. That short statement was my alarm bell. Its time to take advantage of federal funds and try something new. As a metropolitan region we have to grow smarter. Transportation, housing, and jobs all can work together to make this region and this state a great place to live and work.

The first train tracks will connect the airport to downtown Minneapolis. We are already planning busways and commuter rail. All in the name of moving people and goods more efficiently. Whether it’s moving paper products from northern Minnesota mills or a downtown worker riding the bus from a suburb. We need to unplug the congestion.

If we don’t succeed we will end up repeating the history of more urbanized cities. I have lived in Los Angeles. I know firsthand the danger of failing to take action to stop sprawl.

- Failure to take action will lead to endless traffic jams at all hours of the day.
- Failure to take action will lead to the endless consumption of productive farmland.
- And failure to take action will lead to increased costs to business and taxpayers that have to pay forever increasing amounts of infrastructure.

The statistics don't lie: our metropolitan region is among the 10 US urban areas most threatened by sprawl. This concerns me greatly. And should everyone. But so often citizens struck in those traffic jams feel powerless.

It takes leadership and courage to do the right thing. Well, there is a new sheriff in town. I am not here for politics . . . I am here for results.

Commissioners El Tinklenberg, Kit Hadley, and Ted Mondale all have very clear directions to work together to control sprawl and improve transit and housing options. The phrase “smart growth” acknowledges what we have known all along. It all fits together like a puzzle. Jobs and transit. Transit and housing. Housing and schools. They are all interrelated and we must approach them as such.

One of our challenges as a new administration is to reform the Metropolitan Council to work with incentives. We need to give local officials advantage choices. This takes a change of mindset by state government and by local government officials who must decide to work together not compete or punish through politics.

It is a new day.

After the election last November I went to MNDOT on a tour and noticed that on all the walls there were beautiful pictures of roads and bridges and interchanges. El Tinklenberg told me that he ordered new pictures . . . of shiny new light-rail tracks and trains and people movers.

I grew up in South Minneapolis not far from where the first track of LRT is planned. I am well aware of the issues that face the urban core. I remember when I was Mayor of Brooklyn Park. When I was elected there was talk about developing the EDGE of town. I said, “wait a minute - what about taking care of what we already have?” Now I live in Maple Grove on the West Side and can see the threats to that edge of the region. My wife and I have a horse farm – 32 acres. There are a lot of people in the metro area, including our neighbors who are in danger of losing their farm, because of pressure and property taxes.

With one out of four jobs tied to agriculture, we all share in making smart decisions to not let this happen. We need to protect productive agriculture land not just in the Twin Cities but in other urbanizing areas like – St. Cloud, Rochester, Willmar, Moorhead and elsewhere.

Sprawling development is consuming productive agricultural land. Every day an area the size of the Mall of America is paved over for new development. The cost is enormous and the change is forever.

So what does “smart growth” mean to me? I believe that smart growth means we need to do four things well.

Number One - We Must Use Our Land Well

- We need to value open space and farmland. Protect what we love about Minnesota – our rivers, lakes, prairie land and farmland. These are truly the highest and best uses of the land.
- We need to encourage development in places where we already have investments in roads, housing, and schools.

Number Two - We must make sure that there are mixes of land uses in the places where we want development to occur

- Our land use decisions must always, always, always, be connected to transit and transportation decisions. I feel very strongly about this and know that my Commissioners and Met council appointees do as well.
- We need housing that works whether you’re raising kids or in your years of retirement. We need housing choices no matter how much income is earned – the kind that encourages families to stay and invest in a neighborhood.
- And when we have succeeded in stabilizing places people call “home” the streets will be safe, the schools will be good and the cities will be livable.

Number Three - We must provide for a mix of transportation choices – and then make sure that we make land use decisions that fit with transit

- I see a future that includes Light Rail Transit, commuter rail, and buses. I see them full, and if nobody else can see a day when Minnesotans opt for mass transit over cars then they aren’t celebrating the fact that in March over six million riders chose buses in the Metro area. There is a place for a vision that is ten years out. It’s only smart to create a system to help it happen.

Number Four - We must make development decisions that are predictable, fair and cost effective. This is really important. Developers should not always call the shots.

- It's odd that we have helped decrease fairness and predictability through the property tax system. I have directed Revenue Commissioner Matt Smith to rethink the property tax system from top to bottom.
- We need community involvement and collaboration, not conflict.
- We need common sense incentives for making smart decisions and consequences, when necessary, for making short-sighted ones.

As a former mayor, I believe in local control and I also believe that since public investments cross local boundaries, we must have regions that work as a whole.

In conclusion, Richard Moe, a Minnesotan, hits the nail on the head in his thoughtful book “Changing Places: Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl” where he says: “Communities can be shaped by choice, or they can be shaped by chance. We can keep on accepting the kind of communities we get, or we can insist on getting the kind of communities we want.”

This is not easy – in fact its full of conflict. You people need courage to put the public good ahead of personal good. You need courage to put community planning ahead of the next pitch for a planned neighborhood in a cornfield.

“Smart” will only be used to describe the Twin Cities or Minnesota some years down the road if every decision is held up through the prism of these smart growth principles. Sometimes, we will have to say no – sometimes we will need to take a tough stand. I am ready and I believe Minnesota is ready.

Thank you very much.