



The most certain thing I can say about the problems Minnesota has with congestion is that it’s only going to get worse. Like most other states, Minnesota continues to see people flocking toward urban centers. More than half of our state’s people now live within a two-hour drive of the Twin Cities.

Our roads are stop and start during all hours of the day and night. We debate how many lanes of bridges should cross over the St. Croix River – I’m not sure whether we want all those Green Bay Packer fans moving so easily into Vikings territory.

As a mayor of a suburban community, as a traveler all over the country and world, and now as Governor, I have seen the differences between “smart growth” and “shortsighted growth.” Notice I did not say “smart” and “stupid.” I said “smart” and “shortsighted.” It’s very hard to get political people to look out beyond the next election at all levels of government, but that’s exactly what we must do.

Hard decisions are always easier to make when guided by basic principles that bring people together. Principles can help the public understand why sometimes it’s very important to say “NO.” That’s a tough word to deliver, and for many years elected officials haven’t used it often enough. But “NO” is the word that belongs with ideas that are short-sighted, cause urban sprawl, don’t fit together investments in housing, transportation and jobs, or cause current congestion to get worse.

This winter, a network of interested public and private groups came together for the first-ever Smart Growth Conference in Minnesota. It was a privilege to go there and stand in support of Smart Growth Principles they had been able to agree upon after many years of debate. A copy of them is in front of each of you and I encourage you to take them home and consider whether they can be adopted in your states as well.

Basically, these principles challenge us to THINK smart and ACT smart. So much of this is common sense, but it does take courage to do the right things.

For example:

- We need to use land well – conserve open space and farmland. Minnesotans love their rivers, lakes, prairieland, farmland, and forests. But love alone does not conserve land. We need incentives to encourage development in places where we already have investments and believe that leaving something open and green IS its highest and best use.
- We must always, always connect land use decisions to transit and transportation decisions. My cabinet is working very hard in these early months to build a tight connection among themselves to enable this to occur. You will note on the second sheet of the handouts that there are many agencies exploring big picture questions about how to apply the Smart Growth Principles to their policies and budget decisions.
- We need to keep our communities safe and livable no matter how old a person is, no matter what their physical abilities are, or what their income is.



Whether a community is “livable” or not depends a whole lot more on the desire of the individual to be responsible and self-sufficient than anything state government can do, but we should certainly do nothing to stand in the way. Or, even worse, give incentives for individuals to do the wrong things.

That’s why I believe in investing in community schools. Because good schools and good neighborhoods are very connected. That’s why I believe in rail transit. Because a working system that includes light rail, commuter rail, and buses can take the pressure off the road system for all users statewide.

There are way too many people who would rather just do nothing and just keep building roads. But I know firsthand the danger of failing to take action to stop sprawl:

- Traffic jams at all hours of the day.
- Eating up productive farmland.
- Increased costs to business and taxpayers who bear the expense of forever increasing amounts of sewers and roads and utilities.

I’m not talking about Los Angeles, even though I have lived there. I’m talking about my own state. The statistics about Minnesota don’t lie: our metropolitan region is among the 10 US urban areas most threatened by sprawl. I am highly motivated to do something about it. Every day an area the size of our famous Mall of America is paved over for new development. There are a lot of people in the metropolitan areas, including my own neighbors, who are in danger of losing their farm because of growth pressures and property taxes.

The cost is enormous and the change is forever. Our generation cannot put those bad decisions on the little ones who will inherit them.

No more talk ... I want action. The last time I visited our Department of Transportation the new commissioner was quick to point out that he has replaced some of the beautiful pictures of interchanges and roads and bridges that surrounded the Conference Room with shiny new pictures of mass transit people movers. It is a new day.

My cabinet is looking into the problems that were identified by the Smart Growth Network.

- Why don’t we have more coordination among our planning efforts?
- Why don’t we see good, uniform local planning?
- What can we do to beef up the Metropolitan Council and focus them on carrots and not sticks against city councils?
- What can we do to stop setting up bad policies – like a property tax system that actual rewards people for doing the wrong things?

Local officials should be given “advantage choices.” This takes a change of mindset by state government AND local government officials. We must decide to work together and not compete or punish through politics.

Most importantly, we need to involve citizens in discussion of everything from tax policy to transit. It was noted time and again during the Smart Growth process that citizens DO care about the decisions that government makes.

Unfortunately, it’s often very hard to get information and participate in a process that too often is long, complicated, and excludes citizens from real decisions.

Real people do care. It was a big surprise to me recently to be touring a hog farm about 45 minutes away from downtown Minneapolis and have an older woman come up to thank me.

“What for?” I asked, thinking it was because we were leaving the next week for Washington DC to push for fair, free trade policies for farmers in Midwestern states.

But it wasn’t about agriculture. It was about light rail. She said, “Anybody who doesn’t support this just simply hasn’t had the experience I’ve had in San Francisco and other places where we’ve traveled.”

That’s what leadership around Smart Growth demands that we all do. We need to figure out ways to help real citizens imagine a better world that they may not have experienced. The good news is that it won’t be too hard to imagine something better than sitting in a hot car on a hot freeway going nowhere.

Thank you.