

Good afternoon:

Mr. Chair and Commissioners:

I want to thank you for inviting Commissioner Tinklenberg, Chair Mondale and me to meet with you today to discuss transportation.

I know that this is not the way things are usually done. It's probably been a long time since a Minnesota Governor appeared before a board, or boards in this case, of county commissioners. But this session represents an unusual opportunity for Minnesota's transportation future, and I'm here because I want you to know how important I think that is.

It's been over 15 years since a Governor proposed a balanced, statewide transportation plan. I'm changing that. It's time that we recognize the essential role transportation plays in our state's quality of life. The goals of our "big plan" for healthy and vital communities, for independence and self-reliance, for Minnesota's continuing success as a world competitor are all linked to a safe, efficient, reliable transportation system.

That's why I have proposed the plan you will hear about today, and ask that you join with me in making sure that this is the year that we finally stop talking about transportation and actually start doing something about transportation.

Being here in Anoka County, with former Mayor Tinklenberg, it's like Yogi Berra said, "I feel like it's dij`vu all over again." Ten years ago we in the north metro said its time to stop talking about doing something about Highway 610 and start doing something. So El and I jumped on a plane to Washington D.C.

The plan I am proposing (and commissioner Tinklenberg and chair Mondale will be going over the details of it with you) has two parts.

The first fulfills my commitment to the voters that we will lower the outrageous fees they pay for their automobile license tabs. Under my plan, starting July 1, 2000, no one would pay more than \$75 for their car tabs. It is a tax cut equaling nearly \$275 million in the first year. Let me say that again _ it is a tax cut -- and it makes sense. When you buy a fishing license you pay a flat rate no matter what kind of equipment you use. When you go hunting it's the same thing. But when you drive on a road you pay based on how expensive your truck or car is. This makes no sense.

Next, I propose that we transfer 100% of the motor vehicle excise tax to transportation uses. We'll let the people have a voice with a constitutional dedication of about half of the revenue. We'll statutorily dedicate the rest. This is a permanent replacement for the tab reduction and provides new spending for transit and highways through a flexible, multi-modal fund. A flexible fund will allow the Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Council to find the best solutions to serve the people. As I said on January 10th, when we first announced



"Moving Minnesota", the days of a "highway-only" transportation program are over. We have an obligation to provide a variety of transportation choices for Minnesotans. For seniors and disabled citizens to live independently . . . For workers from the inner city to get to suburban jobs . . . For goods from greater Minnesota to quickly move through the metropolitan area. This plan meets the challenge.

With this new flexibility comes responsibility. The days of transportation decisions and investments being made in isolation from land use and sound growth strategies are also over.

We are going to do everything we can to make sure that whether it's a new busway or a commuter rail line or an inter-regional corridor, improvements and investments will be tied to sound planning in partnership with the local communities to protect those investments and maximize their return long into the future. The goal -- after all the investments are made - is to build healthy, vital communities. Transportation systems must be developed to serve that goal and not the other way around.

You know that there are those who want to use this legislative session to refight the light rail votes funded with not one but two super majority votes made during the last two sessions. One was under Republican Governor Arne Carlson and one under my administration. Now some are second-guessing. If this kind of backward effort is allowed to become the focus and succeeds in diverting us from the tremendous opportunity we have, it would truly be a shame. Let no one mistake my determination, I am absolutely committed to breaking the 20 year old LRT log jam that has produced millions of dollars in studies and not one foot of progress. Some folks haven't caught up. There still talking about the Hiawatha corridor _ that's a done deal. We're looking ahead to the Northstar corridor.

As some of you may know, recently President Clinton included \$20 million in the budget he sent to Congress for LRT in Minnesota. This is a strong signal from the federal government that the LRT on Hiawatha is a good project, one worth investing in and that MNDOT is doing a great job in managing the project and bringing all the necessary partners to the table.

This \$20 million commitment further confirms my belief that Minnesota is on the right road. or in this case, right rail.

Passage of my transportation plan will help ensure that projects like the Northstar corridor become a reality. The creation of a stable fund that we can use to leverage federal funds is essential to ensuring that we are able to build necessary projects like the Northstar corridor.

I believe that it is an exciting time for transportation and that together we can keep this year's debate about transportation positive, productive and focused forward. I encourage you to support my transportation plan and let your state legislators know of your support.

Thank you for your interest and time.