

## Top Story

[Time Running Out on Legislative Session](#) *St. Paul Pioneer Press*

The Republicans who control the Minnesota Legislature scurried late last week to assemble the building blocks needed to construct a state budget before the session ends in eight days.

House and Senate negotiators were on pace to wrap up agreements this weekend on the nine remaining tax and spending bills that make up the next two-year budget.

There's just one big problem: They haven't yet laid the foundation on which to build that budget.

Before Republican legislative leaders and Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton can assemble the financial plan, they must agree on an overall spending number. They haven't.

## National

[Speculators Blamed for High Oil Prices](#) *St. Paul Pioneer Press*

Feel like you're being robbed every time you fill the gas tank? Not sure who to blame? Try Wall Street. That's not the conventional explanation, but it's the one the facts point to. Usually analysts say today's high prices stem simply from "supply and demand." They mean demand for oil and gas is rising and supplies aren't keeping up, so people bid up their price. But global and U.S. supplies are plentiful and demand is stable, so that's not it.

Here's what's credible: Some 70 percent of contracts for future oil delivery are now bought by financial speculators - largely big investment banks and hedge funds - who never take control of the oil. They just flip the contract for a quick profit.

[Should Drivers Pay by the Mile Instead of the Gallon?](#) *USA Today*

For nearly 80 years, motorists have paid a tax every time they put gas in their cars. What if they were taxed based on how far they drive instead? The idea, known as vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) taxes, is likely to come up next week at a Senate Finance Committee hearing on ways to pay for future infrastructure. The Congressional Budget Office has talked up the idea, as did a group commissioned by Congress to explore transportation financing. Even the Obama administration floated the idea as part of a draft reauthorization of the highway funding bill, though the White House has since distanced itself from the idea.

[Concern Over Vehicle Miles Traveled Tax](#) *Star Tribune*

Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri, taking a stance that could inoculate her from GOP attacks as she approaches re-election, is telling the Obama administration she opposes efforts to track drivers' mileage.

In a letter addressed to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and provided to The Associated Press on Thursday, McCaskill says any proposal to tax drivers based on miles they drive will place a burden on already cash-strapped motorists.

Her letter comes after Republicans pressed Democrats to disavow the mileage proposal.

## State

[Stadium Proposal Impacts Roadways](#) *Star Tribune*

The route to a Vikings stadium in Ramsey County could be a rocky road if a currently silent partner speaks up. The millions of taxpayer dollars needed to upgrade roads to the former munitions plant site in Arden Hills could bring in the Metropolitan Council, which has authority over road and other regional planning in the seven-county metro area.

A Met Council review of the proposed road improvements to see whether they're compatible with regional plans could suspend action on the stadium project for up to a year.

"We expect to be drawn in," said Steve Elkins, a Met Council member who is chairman of its transportation committee. "All it would take is some complaining party to request a study of the metropolitan significance of the stadium, and that kicks off a whole formal process."

[With Roads in Mind Magnus Authors Bill for Block E Casino](#) *Marshall Independent*

In an attempt to raise much-needed money for the state's ailing infrastructure, District 22 Sen. Doug Magnus on Wednesday said he's authoring a bill in support of future redevelopment in a downtown area of Minneapolis known as Block E.

Magnus' reasoning behind stepping up as lead author of a bill that would directly affect the metro area is that he thinks it would generate a strong source of revenue that would be used for the state's roads and bridges which, he said, are reaching a desperate state.

"I would like to use the majority of the money we would get - projected to be about \$125 million a year - to support statewide infrastructure," he said. "Our infrastructure - our roads and bridges, and other areas - are falling behind."

#### [Creative Transportation Funding](#) *Star Tribune*

MnDOT wants to expand a pilot program where private firms share some of the burden of projects that benefit them and the broader public.

The state has spent \$43 million in the past two years on a dozen highway projects in which local government and business kicked in an additional \$29 million. The biggest project is reconstruction of an interchange at Hwy. 169 and Bren Road in Minnetonka near UnitedHealth Group Inc. The company wanted the improvement for an expansion and "kicked in about a quarter of the overall project cost," Larsen said. The city of Minnetonka and the state picked up other costs.

Larsen said MnDOT selects ventures that wouldn't have made the cut if they had to compete with better projects for limited state funds. He said the projects must have "a high level of statewide economic benefit," but acknowledged that this is hard to measure. MnDOT is seeking more money to expand the program to include transit.

Yet another plan involves private firms loaning the state money to accelerate projects on MnDOT's long to-do list.

The state would pay back businesses for the ultimate cost of the improvement, but it would be completed years ahead of schedule. Legislation is advancing on the arrangement.

#### [High-Speed Rail on Track or Derailed](#) *Finance & Commerce*

The proposed Northern Lights Express high-speed rail project got a boost this week from the federal government, but a lot more state and federal money will have to come down the tracks before the estimated \$800 million project becomes reality.

On Monday, the Minneapolis-to-Duluth line received a \$5 million grant from the Federal Rail Administration, and rail advocates hope for a \$4 million match from the state to complete preliminary engineering and environmental work.

Overall, the feds awarded \$2 billion in grants to 22 projects in 15 states.

#### [McCollum: Bridge plan overlooks congestion](#) *Star Tribune*

A new "megabridge" over the St. Croix River could create "tremendous costs" for cities along Hwy. 36 in Ramsey and Washington counties, U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum told city leaders on Tuesday.

She said the state lacks a comprehensive plan for potentially significant traffic congestion from Roseville east to Stillwater and Oak Park Heights if a four-lane bridge is built. Cities already strapped for cash could find themselves caught between costly traffic bottlenecks and unfunded government mandates, McCollum told mayors and administrators.

#### [Truck Weights Added to Work of Legislative Auditor](#) *Finance & Commerce*

The need to examine truck weight limits hasn't been as visible this year as fiscal notes or local government consolidation. But to Parry and other legislators, it's a huge problem.

"I don't think the average citizen truly realizes the impact that overweight loads have on roads," Parry said.

Parry thinks that lawmakers face a conundrum when it comes to regulating the heavy trucks that lumber along highways bringing goods to market. He hopes the evaluation will make the problem clear.

"I think what will happen is folks in transportation will sit there and see there is a need to re-evaluate whether we need to rebuild the roads to handle heavier loads or we just leave the roads at a certain level because of the cost and lower the weight [limit]," Parry said.

Rep. Michael Beard, R-Shakopee, who is House Transportation Committee chairman and a co-chairman of the commission along with Reinert, said the Legislature has gotten in the habit of granting too many exemptions.

#### [AWC Supports Women in Construction](#) *Finance & Commerce*

Though women have moved into many industries once dominated by men, you can drive by urban construction sites and highway construction zones all summer and rarely see a woman driving machinery or running a crew.

Getting Selb and Cooper and others in the same room is why a small group of women highway contractors started AWC in 1995. The group has expanded to include residential and commercial contractors and to vendors to the industry. AWC now has about 145 members throughout the metro area, 89 of them business owners.

"The majority are small, emerging businesses with revenues under half a million (dollars)," said Barb Christensen, the group's executive director.

#### **Local/Regional**

#### [MnPASS Work Begins on 35W](#) *Star Tribune*

Road construction is coming to one of the busiest stretches of south metro highway.

Interstate 35W between Burnsville Parkway and the I-35E split will become a work zone Monday as the Minnesota Department of Transportation resurfaces the road and extends the MnPass and Smart Lane systems.

#### [Hoping for \\$5M to Repair Plymouth Avenue Bridge](#) *Finance & Commerce*

Minneapolis officials hope to hear in the next week whether the \$5 million needed to repair the Plymouth Avenue Bridge makes it into a state bonding bill this legislative session.

City Engineer Steve Kotke said Monday that the consultants analyzing the bridge estimated it will cost about \$7 million to repair. The city has secured \$2.1 million from the Minnesota Department of Transportation's State Aid Disaster Account, leaving the gap at \$5 million

#### [Wayne Sandberg Named Professional Manager of the Year](#) *St. Paul Pioneer Press*

Wayne Sandberg, deputy public works director for Washington County, has been named Professional Manager of the Year by the American Public Works Association.

Sandberg was awarded for his introduction of leadership reviews and focus on worksite safety. He also has been a central figure in such initiatives as "Roundabout U" and road safety - for which he received the 2010 Towards Zero Death Engineering Star Award.

#### [MnDOT Opens Bids for Highway 60 Work](#) *Finance & Commerce*

Commuters who have long pushed for safety and capacity improvements to Highway 60 in southern Minnesota are starting to see their efforts pay off.

On Friday, the Minnesota Department of Transportation opened bids for a project that will expand a portion of the road from two lanes to four lanes near Worthington. MnDOT also opened bids for a related bridge project.

The two projects, which represent nearly \$18 million of construction work, are part of a \$67 million, three-phase effort to expand Highway 60 "basically from Iowa to Interstate 90" near Worthington, said Keith Bloomgren, MnDOT's resident engineer for District 7 in Windom.

#### **Other States**

#### [Virginia Completes \\$600M Bond Sale to Fund Transportation Projects](#) *Washington Post*

A \$600 million bond sale to help pay for transportation projects across Virginia has been completed. McDonnell's plan recommends more than 900 new transportation projects. He says Virginians can expect to see construction on an unprecedented scale during the next three years.

[Planning Body Raises Concerns Over Turnpike Lease](#) *Cleveland.com*

Most elected leaders in big cities and counties here have a message for Gov. John Kasich -- don't sell or lease the Ohio Turnpike.

Officials with a powerful, five-county planning body voted Friday to oppose Kasich's idea of landing billions of dollars by leasing the 241-mile toll road.

[Public/Private Toll Project in Georgia](#) *ajc.com*

For the 90,000 drivers in I-75's morning rush toward Atlanta each day, the hope of finding a lane that won't be clogged may be just a few years away. After years of false starts, the state Department of Transportation says it will soon open bidding on the largest transportation contract in state history — a \$1 billion project to add 29 miles of reversible lanes alongside I-75 and I-575 in Cobb and Cherokee counties. It is the state's maiden attempt to build public roads with private investment.

But it will come at a cost.