

## Top Stories

### [Transportation Advocates Promote Expanded Transportation System](#) *Minnesota Public Radio*

Transportation advocates say the state needs to improve its transportation network to help local businesses and the economy. Officials from MnDOT, policy groups and the Minnesota business community met at a transportation roundtable Monday in St. Paul to share ideas for financing, improving and maintaining roads and transit.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that every dollar invested in infrastructure generates \$1.60 in new economic growth.

Margaret Donahoe, executive director of the [Minnesota Transportation Alliance](#), said transportation improvements will also create needed construction jobs in the state.

"They are the kind of jobs that generate a multiplier effect in local economies," Donahoe said. "At the same time, we are building the infrastructure that other general businesses need to move products, to move people. To do what they do, they have to have that transportation infrastructure."

### [Report: MnDOT Spent \\$2.3 Million on Shutdown Tasks](#) *Finance & Commerce*

The Minnesota Department of Transportation spent about \$2.3 million to prepare for and recover from a state government shutdown that stalled roughly 100 road construction projects last July.

The costs were included in a [report released Tuesday](#) by the Minnesota Management & Budget office, which says the state spent about \$10 million overall in preparation and recovery costs.

But the numbers – at least in MnDOT's case — are only scratching the road surface.

The MnDOT costs detailed in the report don't include the contractor claims stemming from the disruption of highway projects. Contractors have pending claims for everything from temporary traffic control to demobilizing and remobilizing their projects.

Those numbers aren't in yet, but industry sources say the claims could be in the tens of millions of dollars.

"This will have a very real impact on the highway construction budget – taking money away from future projects for costs that should not have been incurred," said Margaret Donahoe, executive director of the [Minnesota Transportation Alliance](#).

## National

### [LaHood: Avoid Across the Board Cuts After Supercommittee Failure](#) *Transportation Nation*

The congressional supercommittee officially tossed in the towel on Monday afternoon. That's after the six Democrats and six Republicans failed to get close to any agreement on how to achieve at least \$1.2 trillion in debt reduction over the next ten years.

Now Washington confronts what's known as the "sequester": \$1.2 trillion in automatic cuts that take effect January 2013. Half the cuts come from defense, and hawkish lawmakers are already pledging to undo those. But the other half come from across-the-board cuts to discretionary programs, including transportation. On Monday evening, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood issued the following statement:

"When times are tough, Americans have always come together to accomplish big things. It's disappointing that some in Congress haven't been willing to do the same. Because the supercommittee failed to reach an agreement, we now face across-the-board cuts to programs that are critical to rebuilding our crumbling transportation infrastructure and putting Americans back to work."

### [House GOP Proposes Expanded Oil Drilling to Fund Transportation](#) *Washington Post*

House Republicans on Thursday proposed an expansion of domestic oil production to fund a long-term transportation spending bill, a plan that sets the stage for a showdown with Senate Democrats who don't want highway funding coupled with drilling for new oil.

House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) said he hopes to pass a multi-year surface transportation bill by year's end that would serve as the centerpiece of a GOP jobs plan. He said expanded drilling could "provide a new revenue stream for infrastructure repair and improvement."

The House proposal drew immediate reaction from Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), whose Environment and Public Works Committee approved a [surface transportation bill](#) last week. "The proposal by Republican leadership would mire a very popular surface transportation bill in controversy, and it would directly threaten many thousands of fishing, tourism and recreation-related jobs," Boxer said. "In addition, I am told by financial experts that this proposal would fall billions short."

#### [Changes to MPO Process Raise Concerns](#) *Visalia Times Delta*

A proposed Senate version of a new U.S. transportation bill has raised the ire of the Tulare County Association of Governments and similar agencies across the country that administer federal transportation dollars.

The concern stems from a provision of a 600-page draft bill by a Senate committee that — if it became law — would wrest control of how to spend federal transportation and air pollution-reduction funds from TCAG and about half the other metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in the country.

#### [LaHood – Transportation Bill Urgent](#) *PJ Star*

Congress needs to pass a transportation bill by the end of the year, Ray LaHood said during his visit to Peoria Camera Shop on Saturday.

New legislation to fund federal highway and rail construction "really translates into jobs for America," the U.S. secretary of transportation said.

He said it is particularly urgent because a plan needs to be in place soon in order for states to take advantage of it during next year's construction season.

"Everybody knows America is one big pothole," he said.

#### [Congress, States Debate Heavier Trucks](#) *Fox News*

Large trucks on America's interstates could become 20 percent heavier. The Coalition for Transportation Productivity, a group of more than 100 major shippers including Coca-Cola and The Home Depot, is supporting legislation in Congress that, proponents say, would increase efficiency and reduce emissions.

"With the Panama Canal being deepened, these larger cargo ships coming in are going to be carrying containers that weigh 97,000 pounds," said Rep. Lynn Westmoreland (R-GA). "If we continue to have our weight limit at 80,000 pounds, then we would have to take the containers, unload them, repack them, put them on trucks and use more trucks to do that."

"If we advocate for higher weights, it's going to be more wear and tear on our roads, which means more money," said Jim Cole, a board member of the Georgia Department of Transportation. "We have to balance that with an economic picture of the future, as well."

### **State**

#### [Transportation Alliance on Minnesota Jobs](#) *KAAL TV*

Planes, trains or automobiles, they all help us get from point A to point B.

Now a statewide coalition of organizations are saying that transportation could be a good starting point to get people back to work and fix the economy.

High unemployment rates and a tough economy continue to be top concerns across the nation.

"That's a very hot topic right now, the government, the president, congress, everyone is trying to find ways to create jobs and get the economy back on track," said Margaret Donahoe, Executive Director,

[Minn. Transportation Alliance](#).

#### [MnDOT Freight Study Calls for 94/US 10 Link](#) *St. Cloud Times*

Solutions for sluggish truck traffic on Interstate Highway 94 in Central Minnesota include bolstering the interstate's capacity or linking it to U.S. Highway 10 via a new freeway connection.

That's according to a preliminary state study of freight transportation in the region, released by the Minnesota Department of Transportation earlier this month. MnDOT fielded public comment on the draft study at a meeting Monday afternoon in St. Cloud.

The freight study's endorsement wouldn't single-handedly put these improvements on a fast track to completion. But it would underscore their value, said Steve Voss, a district planning director for MnDOT.

"Capacity improvements" to Interstate 94 in Central Minnesota — which could include adding lanes, according to Voss — is one of the study's recommendations.

### [Plans for High Speed Rail Include Milwaukee](#) *Finance & Commerce*

Without high-speed rail support in Wisconsin, the Minnesota Department of Transportation is going solo with plans to upgrade the existing Empire Builder train line between the Twin Cities and Milwaukee.

Minnesota's DOT has recommended upgrading Amtrak's Empire Builder route — which runs once a day from Milwaukee to the Twin Cities and continues to Portland, Ore. — to a 110 mph route with seven daily trains in each direction.

But crucial details, such as who would pay for the \$2.4 billion plan and whether Wisconsin would be a partner, remain uncertain, said Dan Krom, the director of Minnesota's passenger rail office.

### [DBEs Receive Scrutiny](#) *Star Tribune*

White women make up the single biggest group of Disadvantaged Business Enterprises working on the Central Corridor. They claimed ownership and control of half of the firms that qualified as "DBEs" to work on the project.

Verifying their eligibility is important because they are allowed to win contracts with higher bids than other firms, potentially adding to the cost of a project. Government agencies are supposed to confirm that women or minorities in the DBE program hold majority ownership of a firm and control its operations.

## **Local/Regional**

### [Light Rail Vision Takes Shape in Twin Cities Suburbs](#) *Finance & Commerce*

Almost two years into the early planning for a commuter light rail transit (LRT) line running from Minneapolis to Eden Prairie, suburban cities along the line are looking through time to see what types of land development should occur alongside the tracks.

With the metro area's first LRT line — the Hiawatha — up and running and the second under construction, the agencies doing the planning know what's not going to happen this time: No awkward triangles of land cut off by rail and streets to create development headaches.

"It's going to be different [from Hiawatha]," said Susan Haigh, chairwoman of the Metropolitan Council. "We know so much more."

### [Opposition to St. Croix Bridge](#) *Star Tribune*

Opposition to spending \$360 million for Minnesota's share of a new St. Croix River bridge is growing among some state legislators who want the money released for transportation needs that will benefit a larger number of residents.

Spending that sum on top of \$100 million or more to improve highways leading to a potential new Vikings stadium in Arden Hills, the legislators say, would leave the state desperately short of cash needed to fix hundreds of deteriorating roads and bridges.

Governor Dayton has "consistently and clearly" stated his support for the bigger bridge, spokeswoman Katharine Tinucci said this week. Allegations that Minnesota will run short of money for other road and bridge projects "are not based in fact," she said.

### [Frontage Roads Given Go-Ahead in Pine Island](#) *Star Tribune*

The Minnesota Department of Transportation has given the go-ahead for construction of frontage roads to connect a much-delayed bioscience business park in Pine Island with a multimillion-dollar highway interchange project.

The move is a vote of confidence that California developer Tower Investments will deliver on its vision for Elk Run, a 200-acre project to be built 15 miles north of Rochester.

[Residents Want Action on Highway 52](#) *Minnesota Public Radio*

Two deadly accidents on Highway 52 in October re-fueled concerns about a dangerous intersection on the highway between the Twin Cities and Rochester.

Transportation, public safety officials and legislators met Monday to discuss plans, including high-tech highway signals being tested south of Cannon Falls. Some residents said they're tired of waiting for a permanent solution.

The intersection in question — [Highway 52 and County Road 9](#) — is just south of Cannon Falls. Four LED signs light up the intersection and are meant to tell drivers when it's safe to cross the intersection, which MnDOT says is the 13th-most dangerous in the state.

Other States

[Ballot Initiative Faces Challenges](#) *Gainesville Times*

The White County Chamber of Commerce has its work cut out in 2012.

The organization will push for voters March 6 to extend a 1 percent special purpose local option sales tax for government improvements, then turn around and advocate passage July 31 of a 1 percent regional sales tax for transportation.

"It's obviously a real challenge, but the simple fact is, like everything in life, we weigh the costs versus the benefits," said Doug Callaway, who heads the Georgia Chamber of Commerce's Georgia Transportation Alliance. "I'm probably the most fiscally conservative person I know ... and I've got to tell you the benefits are overwhelming."

[Even in Transit First San Francisco Cars Rule Road](#) *San Francisco Examiner*

Established in 1973, The City's official policy was created to ensure that every new transportation initiative had the end goal of moving people out of automobiles and into more-sustainable options such as public transit, biking and walking.

While more San Franciscans are using alternative forms of transportation now, nearly 39 percent of city residents said in 2009 — the most recent year of available data — they drive alone to work, more than any other mode of travel. And even though San Franciscans pride themselves on being aware of the ills of carbon emissions, recent initiatives to encourage mode shifts out of automobiles — such as extending parking meter hours and implementing congestion pricing for cars — have been met with shrieks of outrage and derision.

[New Criteria for Distributing Funds](#) *Mercury News*

No longer is a speedier commute the primary way to assess the benefits of 90 of the most expensive transportation projects being considered in the Bay Area over the next 25 years.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission is looking at factors often ignored when assessing whether it is financially worthwhile to pay millions to widen highways and expand trains. Road fatalities and injuries, emissions reductions, the cost of owning and operating a car and even the health effects of physical inactivity are being considered in the Project Performance Assessment study now under way.

The MTC allocates state and federal funds to the nine Bay Area counties, and without that money some projects rated highly by local agencies could be scrapped -- among them light-rail extensions in Santa Clara County, more Caltrain service to San Francisco, and a BART link to Livermore.

[Proposal Would Double Sales Tax for Transportation](#) *Mercury News*

Alameda County's transportation commission has proposed asking voters in November 2012 to double the county sales tax for transportation -- from a half cent to one cent.

The money would be used to fix potholes, build trails and boost public transit.

If the measure wins by the required two-thirds margin, Alameda would become only the second county in California to raise its transportation sales tax to a penny. Los Angeles County was the first.