

## Top Story

### [Capital Bonding Bill Includes Transportation Funding](#) *MPR*

The nearly \$500 million bonding bill signed into law Wednesday will borrow \$10 million for local road maintenance and safety improvements.

The bill also designates nearly \$56 million dollars toward the state's transportation infrastructure, which includes \$33 million for local bridge repair and replacement. Twin Cities transitways will receive \$20 million for projects that include the 35W south Bus Rapid Transit line, or BRT, and the Cedar Avenue BRT line.

Minnesota Transportation Alliance executive director Margaret Donahoe said the money is welcome, but falls short of the need.

"For local roads the \$10 million is a good start but we have probably a \$100 million worth of projects on local roads between safety projects, repair and replacement projects, matching funds for trunk highway projects that could be used right away," Donahoe said.

### [Bonding Bill Provides Some Relief](#) *Finance & Commerce*

Passage of the \$531 million construction bonding bill is somewhat of a consolation prize for Minnesota builders who suffered through the longest state government shutdown in U.S. history. Margaret Donahoe, executive director of the Minnesota Transportation Alliance, said the state's local roads and bridges have plenty of needs. More than \$76 million worth of local bridge projects are ready to go once they receive state funding, Donahoe said. The alliance recommends at least \$100 million for local roads, including roads of regional significance, rural road safety and trunk highway corridors.

"This is a great bill; it's great that they did it now," Donahoe said. "But I hope they will also consider doing an additional bonding bill next session and the session after that."

## National

### [St. Croix River Crossing Bill to Get Hearing](#) *Star Tribune*

A bill sponsored by Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., to start a process that would exempt a proposed bridge across the St. Croix River from the protection of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act will get its first hearing July 28.

Klobuchar's bill, supported by Govs. Mark Dayton of Minnesota and Scott Walker of Wisconsin, also contains a package of mitigation efforts to protect the St. Croix River.

Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., also has proposed a bill in the House that would clear the way for a new bridge.

Dayton warned Bachmann last month that \$363 million in state and federal funds now earmarked for the bridge will be redirected elsewhere if Congress doesn't approve the plan by Sept. 30.

### [High Speed Rail Funds Sought for Flood Relief](#) *Pioneer Press*

Congressional Republicans this week are trying to sidetrack \$1.5 billion in high-speed rail funds already awarded to several states.

In an adroit maneuver, GOP lawmakers propose shifting the high-speed rail dollars to pay for Midwestern disaster relief. The move would help ease the federal deficit while underscoring Republican resistance toward the Obama administration's rail plans.

## State

### [MnDOT Restarting Operations](#) *Bemidji Pioneer*

The Minnesota Department of Transportation began restarting its operations Thursday following a government shutdown of nearly three weeks.

MnDOT Commissioner Tom Sorel says some services will be up and running fairly quickly, including MnPASS, traffic cameras and freeway incident response trucks. But, others will take longer to bring back on line.

Sorel says district construction management offices around the state will be in touch with contractors to get construction projects restarted and try to make up for lost time.

### [Slow Start for Government Operations to Resume](#) *MPR*

In a conference call with reporters Tuesday afternoon, Budget Commissioner Jim Showalter said the administration is anxious to get thousands of laid-off state employees back to work, but he added that won't happen right away.

Tim Worke, Director of the Transportation and Highway Division with the Associated General Contractors of Minnesota, said it'll take several days - maybe even a week - to restart construction projects. Worke said some companies took on private jobs during the shutdown not knowing how long it would last.

### [Transit Cuts Deep But Less Than Feared](#) *Finance & Commerce*

A 40 percent cut in transit money expected to emerge from a special legislative session that convened Tuesday is dramatic, but it's a far cry from the 85 percent cut in the original transportation bill.

No wonder transit advocates are essentially saying, "Whew! It could have been a lot worse."

Margaret Donahoe, executive director of the Minnesota Transportation Alliance, was one: "We're very pleased to see the drastic cuts in transit funding reduced significantly in this new agreement."

But, she added, "It's unfortunate that the state is backing away from its share of the cost of existing transit ways and requiring counties to shoulder more of the cost. This will reduce funding needed for future transit ways around the region."

Metropolitan Council officials are saying the less dramatic reduction means no service cuts, fare increases or layoffs.

### [End Secret Talks at Capitol](#) *St. Cloud Times*

Minnesota's legislators and governor spent more than six months trying to craft a budget plan while examining countless policy measures. Anything remotely controversial stumped them and, as you know, shuttered state government.

So what gives when these same officials are able to reconvene for a special session and in little more than 12 hours review, debate and decide the very issues they fought bitterly about for six months?

## **Regional/Local**

### [Slower, Lower Bridge Proposed](#) *Star Tribune*

Members of the new Sensible Stillwater Bridge coalition, referring to the existing \$690 million bridge proposal as a "boondoggle," unveiled plans for a lower bridge with a slower speed limit that they said would save money for other pressing Minnesota bridge needs and protect the scenic St. Croix at the same time.

The proposed three-lane bridge, which proponents say would cost \$283 million, would angle from the south end of Stillwater near the Oasis Cafe to where the Stillwater Lift Bridge meets the Wisconsin side of the river. The speed limit would be 40 miles per hour, compared with 65 mph on the current proposal.

### [Keep Bridge on Track](#) *Star Tribune*

Here we go again. At a time when a St. Croix bridge project is one of the few proposals anywhere receiving bipartisan support -- from members of Congress as well as the Democratic governor of Minnesota and Wisconsin's Republican governor -- environmentalists are launching a new push to sandbag the effort.

Calling themselves the Sensible Stillwater Bridge Coalition, they're offering an alternative bridge proposal that's neither sensible nor environmentally sound. Folks, we've crossed this bridge before -- it's a recycled version of a proposal that was offered previously by environmentalists, but failed to receive support for good reason.

### [Highway 14 Project on Fast Track](#) *Star Tribune*

Construction on the \$35 million project was to start Monday along the 3 1/2-mile stretch of road west of Hwy. 65 in Blaine and east of Hanson Boulevard in Coon Rapids. It is expected to be completed in August of next year.

When it's done, the road will include four lanes with walking paths along the whole stretch, with the addition of turning lanes at busy intersections.

County officials say the work is meant to ease congestion and improve safety on a narrow roadway that has become insufficient for daily traffic counts that are projected to reach 42,000 trips a day, up from 20,000 in 2002.

### [Top Project: Crosstown Reconstruction](#) *Finance & Commerce*

After three years of detours and delays, the mammoth reconstruction of the Crosstown Commons opened for traffic last October. For many motorists, the simple act of being able to veer smoothly past the northbound Interstate 35W exit while traveling east on Highway 62 made the entire process well worth the wait.

To call the project huge would be an understatement. It involved a total of six miles of highway reconstruction as well as the construction of 26 bridges, 10 miles of retaining walls, eight miles of noise walls and six miles of storm sewer pipe. The design also introduced the area's first in-line median bus rapid transit station and brought expanded MnPASS managed lanes to 35W for the first time.

### **Other States**

#### [Pennsylvania Transportation Funding Plan Approved](#) *Forbes*

Gov. Tom Corbett's transportation funding commission on Monday endorsed a mixture of revenue sources to generate about \$2.5 billion in additional annual spending for Pennsylvania's roads, bridges and mass transit.

The commission looked for ways to pay for statewide needs estimated in one recent study at about \$3.6 billion a year. Those include dangerous bridges, crumbling asphalt and underfunded mass transit systems.

The proposals that were approved would bring in \$2.5 billion per year, the bulk of it generated by taking a cap off the oil company franchise tax. At the end of a five-year phase-in period, that alone would create about \$1.4 billion.

Another proposal would divert about \$300 million in motor-license fund proceeds that currently help pay for state police operations. The commission voted to dedicate 2 percent of the state's sales tax proceeds for mass transit.

Vehicle and driver fee changes they endorsed would bring in nearly \$600 million, with the annual cost for the average Pennsylvania driver not expected to be more than \$132. It was projected to cost trucking companies more than \$500 per year for each tractor-trailer.

#### [Federal Budget Cuts Won't Impact Virginia Plan](#) *Loudon Times*

As federal debt ceiling talks drag on, cuts in federal spending are almost guaranteed, including the transportation dollars that help Virginia pave roads and build interchanges.

Gov. Bob McDonnell said he hopes needed federal spending cuts won't touch transportation or defense funding, which should be national priorities. But even if transportation support is reduced, McDonnell said it won't affect the state's borrowing.

The federal Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle, known as a GARVEE bonds, which would repay the \$1.1 billion, only represent about 8 percent of the total federal transportation funds the state receives, he said.

#### [Committee Explores News Ways to Pay for Transportation](#) *Seattle Times*

Gov. Chris Gregoire is beginning a series of meetings that will seek to identify new ways to raise revenue to pay for transportation projects.

Gregoire and other transportation leaders will gather Tuesday in Seattle. They are to develop a 10-year plan that will identify projects and ways to pay for them, including the possibility of new taxes, fees and tolls. The results will be presented to the Legislature next year and possibly to voters.

[Federal Loan Approved for Toll Lanes](#) *Biz Journals*

Georgia has been given the go-ahead for a federal loan of up to \$270 million to build toll lanes along interstates 75 and 575, Gov. **Nathan Deal** announced Tuesday.

The loan will be a critical component in a project expected to cost nearly \$1 billion, Deal told reporters during a news conference at his Capitol office.

[Transportation Panel Develops Project List](#) *Augusta Chronicle*

With relative ease, the Central Savannah River Area Regional Transportation Roundtable's executive committee shaved a project list to within \$10 million of its goal Tuesday.

Under 2010's Transportation Investment Act, the committee has until Aug. 15 to complete a list for approval by the full roundtable. The list, if approved, will go before voters next year to fund through a new 1 percent sales tax.