

RESOLUTION
By Wonsley, Osman, Cashman

Expressing the City's priorities for the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Rethinking I-94 Project.

Whereas, the Minnesota Department of Transportation is planning for the full reconstruction of I-94 between Hiawatha Avenue and Marion Street as part of its Rethinking I-94 Project, impacting the Minneapolis neighborhoods of Cedar Riverside, Elliott Park, Ventura Village, Seward, and Prospect Park; and

Whereas, the City of Minneapolis passed a previous resolution in 2020 stating the City's high-level goals for the Rethinking I-94 Project, and this resolution is intended to build on that feedback to state the City's priorities before key upcoming project decisions; and

Whereas, due to racially restrictive housing covenants that were applied to properties in Minneapolis throughout much of the 20th century, Cedar Riverside was one of the few neighborhoods in Minneapolis that Black families could live, work, and socialize; and

Whereas Cedar Riverside was also a landing spot for Jewish refugees and European immigrants throughout the late 19th and 20th century, and the neighboring area of Phillips was and is a hub for Indigenous residents; and

Whereas historic non-white and working class neighborhoods like Cedar Riverside were targeted by State and City planners for highway construction as a mechanism to remove residents, and the construction of I-94 and I-35W displaced hundreds of homes, businesses, places of worship and community institutions in Minneapolis in the 1950s and 1960s, including St. James African Methodist Episcopal, the first Black congregation in Minnesota; the local Pillsbury United Communities, a community cornerstone that supported youth; the Key Club, a Black-owned venue that employed numerous Black residents and hosted cultural events; and Seven Corners Library, the only public library in the neighborhood that served as a community hub and invaluable resource to the immigrant and migrant laborers who moved into the neighborhood and supported Minneapolis' industries and growth; and

Whereas, the area known as Cedar Riverside was contiguous with other neighborhoods, which supported each other (now known as Seward and Phillips) with walkable necessities and amenities, and I-94 and its interchanges effectively divided these neighborhoods, permanently reducing local accessibility for all residents but especially the elderly and children and those with limited vehicle access, confining local business prosperity, effectively eliminating the usability of the once-essential Riverside Park, and adding multiple long-term pollution sources; and

Whereas today highways including I-94, I-35, and MN-55 occupy over 456 acres in and around Cedar Riverside alone, occupying space that could be repurposed for community benefit; and

Whereas, the proposed project area today is a rich and diverse community wherein 42% of residents are people of color and 38.45% of households are at low income levels; and

Whereas, the Rethinking I-94 project area runs through many Transportation Equity Priority (TEP) areas, as defined by the Minneapolis Racial Equity Framework for Transportation; and

Whereas, the Minneapolis Racial Equity Framework for Transportation notes that “formerly redlined areas comprise 17% of Minneapolis’ land but include 48% of the total miles of freeway”; and

Whereas, The Minneapolis Racial Equity Framework for Transportation also notes that “The residents who remain near these freeways suffer the effects of concentrated emissions, decades of toxic lead and continuing pollutants including particulate matter,” and “People who live within a quarter mile of a highway” in neighborhoods like Elliot Park, Cedar Riverside, Seward and Prospect Park, “are more likely to experience childhood asthma, impaired lung function, premature death and death from cardiovascular diseases and cardiovascular morbidity”; and

Whereas, childhood asthma is a significant cause of school absenteeism and contributes to educational disparities; and

Whereas, listed actions in the Racial Equity Framework for Transportation include: “Encourage and support regional efforts to explore options and opportunities to address harms of past transportation decisions,” “work to understand and communicate as part of project development the non-transportation impacts on residents and businesses of transportation projects (e.g. land use, property values, housing affordability, cultural displacement, etc.),” and “encourage and support the inclusion of anti-displacement work when major investments occur (e.g. light rail projects) led by partners at the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Hennepin County and/or and Metro Transit”; and

Whereas, the City of Minneapolis has adopted the Transportation Action Plan, a policy framework that prioritizes walking, bicycling, and transit, with goals of increasing equity in our transportation system, reducing carbon emissions, improving human health through improved air quality and increased active travel, and enabling the safe movement of people, goods, and services across the city; and

Whereas, transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Minnesota, and the City of Minneapolis set a goal to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 as outlined in the Climate Equity Plan; and

Whereas, the Minneapolis Climate Action plan, now updated as the Climate Equity Plan, has a stated goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the city, and that by 2030, 3 of 5 trips in Minneapolis are taken by people walking, biking, or riding transit; and the City supports the Metropolitan Council’s goal of doubling regional transit ridership by 2030; and

Whereas, a growing network of mobility infrastructure including bus rapid transit and protected bike lanes create local travel opportunities that are inexpensive, safe, fast, and convenient, rendering many local trips by interstate highway unnecessary; and

Whereas, remote work has shifted commuting habits and has affected travel patterns on I-94; and

Whereas, following their construction, high-speed urban highways have since been recognized as injurious to the economic vitality, livability, and safety of the dense communities they were intended to serve; and

Whereas, cities across the country, such as Rochester, NY, Milwaukee, WI, and San Francisco, CA, have replaced urban freeways with local streets and new community development and additional projects are being planned; and

Whereas, the Policy Advisory Committee and the public have been presented with differing research, recommendations and conclusions as it relates to urban freeway removal projects across the country and how they relate to Rethinking I-94; and

Whereas, data from completed projects has demonstrated that expanding highways induces more car trips and congestion, while reducing lanes and/or converting them into multimodal boulevards incentivizes mode shift; and

Whereas, repurposing highway right-of-way into new housing and businesses has the potential to grow the Minneapolis tax base and add new affordable housing units and job opportunities; and

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved by The City Council of The City of Minneapolis:

That the City Council of Minneapolis continues to strongly oppose the repair or reconstruction of I-94 in its current form and rejects any roadway expansion or any right of way expansion within its boundaries.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis supports a wide variety of highway removal options in the upcoming Rethinking I-94 scoping decision document, including the addition of a “restored network” alternative with fewer lanes, which would maximize the potential to repurpose highway land for new public housing, affordable commercial space, parks, community gardens, or other uses determined by surrounding communities.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis supports studying options that repurpose the I-94 trench for high-speed connections between downtown Minneapolis to downtown Saint Paul and the broader region.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis requests that MnDOT review the report conducted by Our Streets and their consultant on about reparative highway alternatives, evaluation metrics, and how it relates to the Rethinking I-94 project; and provide the Policy Advisory Committee and the public with an explanation for the differences between that report and the one conducted by MnDOT on highway alternatives and I-94; and

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis is committed to participating with other government partners in multijurisdictional workgroups convened by the Minnesota Department of Transportation or other coordinating entities to study and implement proactive anti-displacement policies and reparations programs along the project corridor and evaluate opportunities to repurpose highway land for community benefit.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council supports updated traffic models to utilize dynamic traffic assignment (DTA) and incorporate potential future land use changes, which would improve modeling accuracy for complex changes; and

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis asks the Minnesota Department of Transportation to disclose the margins of error and/or uncertainty of traffic models when sharing modeling results with members of the public and government partners.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis believes the Rethinking I-94 project area should be extended to connect into the downtowns of Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis believes all future decisions about the future of I-94 should be made with robust community engagement and in partnership with surrounding residents and businesses, and supports all efforts to improve transparency and community engagement in the Rethinking I-94 process, including visualizing, to-scale, what each studied project alternatives would look like in each corridor neighborhood, and disclosing how each project option would impact pollution, health outcomes, greenhouse gas emissions, traffic noise, racial equity, and economic development.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis asks the Minnesota Department of Transportation to improve the Rethinking I-94 project's evaluation criteria to more accurately measure and prioritize the impacts on adjacent neighborhoods, including adding specificity to metrics of air quality, public health and the environment, equity, mobility, walkability, bikeability, sense of place, and connectivity.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis asks the Minnesota Department of Transportation to halt planning on bridge projects within the Rethinking I-94 project corridor until a preferred alternative is selected.

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council of Minneapolis supports cross-collaboration efforts with other agencies, and encourages the Minnesota Department of Transportation to apply for a US Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities & Neighborhoods grant for the study of a boulevard conversion of the Rethinking I-94 corridor.