

Regarding MPO Certification & Met Council Structure

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I served as a transit modal representative on the Met Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) for seven years — 2016 through 2023, and before that as Minnesota organizer promoting the intact reauthorization of the Federal transportation funding reform law then known as ISTEA, originally sponsored by Senator Daniel Moynihan in 1990. It was this law that guaranteed direct funding from the Federal Government to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to balance urban investment with rural and suburban investment from Federal gas tax revenues.

As you know the current Metropolitan Council is qualified as a metropolitan planning organization or MPO in part because it delegates distribution of Federal surface transportation funds to the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB), which has eight district, seven county, ten city, five agency and four modal voting reps. I believe the organic Federal surface transportation law (originally passed as the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act or ISTEA in 1991) requires that Federal surface transportation funding decisions be made by a body (in our case the TAB) consisting of a majority of elected officials. This delegation to the TAB means that, in surface transportation Federal funding, the current Met Council, while appointed by the Governor and nominally representing equal districts, is technically in effect a Council of Governments (COG) model, not a proportional representation model, because it is the TAB whose Federal transportation funding decisions are final, not the Met Council. It is also true that the MPO designation is grandfathered in because our Met Council predates ISTEA but, equally qualifying, because one of TAB's agency reps (Suburban Transit Association) is an indirectly elected official, making TAB's membership 18 (indirectly) elected officials and 17 directly appointed officials — qualifying as an MPO.

As I testified to this body earlier, I believe it essential that any structural change to the Met Council result in direct, proportionally-elected membership, not a Council of Governments (COG) model. As Hennepin County Commissioner Marion Greene eloquently pointed out on January 3, the real constituents of the Met Council's immensely impactful regional programs — including its huge regional transportation investments and operations — are voters, not governments. Citizens should not have to penetrate two layers of indirect representation to understand and hold accountable the use of \$200-\$300M in categorical Federal surface transportation funds every cycle — not to mention the billions in Federal Transit Admin (FTA) capital funds for New Starts projects such as the Blue and Green Lines. If Southwest LRT and the Blue Line Extension had been planned under a directly-elected Met Council, I submit to you that those lines would be operating today at much less up-front capital cost and delay.

The many existing jurisdictions within the seven-county metro area are actually big government. A proportionately-elected Met Council will actually be smaller government, provided it has the power of a home rule charter. This is because the size of government is directly related to its complexity and it's complexity is directly related to the number of jurisdictional boundaries and barriers that stand in the way of getting anything done for the region as a whole.

The 3.2 million citizens most affected by what the Met Council does deserve and require a direct, proportional say in who sits on the Council. Those who preside over Met Council programs and operations should have no divided allegiances to other governments. They should also have the independence of a full-time position and salary. Anything less, or different, will deprive us of self-government at the level which, I submit, has come to be most important in many of our affairs.