

STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR CARLSON ON ~~WVAAW~~ SF 2510,  
The Light Rail Transit Final Design Construction Act

The decision to pocket veto this bill was an extremely difficult one. Legislators from both parties worked hard to transform the original draft into a governance plan that could realistically manage a proposal of this magnitude. I also respect the Metro Council's willingness to take a leadership role on an issue whose progress has been delayed for years by local political differences and balkanization of authority. Unfortunately, despite those efforts several problems remain in the bill that preclude accepting it in its present form.

First, the bill in clear and explicit language instructs the Commissioner of Transportation (in conjunction with the Regional Transit Board and affected Regional Rail Authority) to submit an application for Federal funding of LRT. While it may not have been intended that way by all who supported the bill, this language is tantamount to a legislative determination to proceed with the project, and that determination is premature.

The requirements that the U.S. DOT places on new start transit applications are the same requirements that any sound planning process would require before submission of an application. They include completion of an alternatives analysis and a cost benefit analysis testing the project against alternative forms of transit and transportation; neither has been performed for the proposed LRT project. It also requires clear identification of the source for matching funds, and a high degree of certainty that those funds will be available.

Beyond the issue of U.S. DOT's requirements, Minnesota has a responsibility to exercise good stewardship over its scarce transit funds. No Governor, legislature, or planning agency should commit to an investment of this magnitude without a cost benefit study that tests LRT against alternate forms of transit; without an assessment of potential subsidies, the source from which those subsidies will be paid, and the impact they will have on other transportation systems; without an alternatives analysis with opportunity for public input; and without ridership projections based on recent and comprehensive origin and destination data. The absence of all or part of these studies has been a principal roadblock to resolution of the LRT debate for many years, and we should not mandate an application for Federal funding until we have acquired this data and taken a position, as a state, that we want this project to go ahead.

Second, while I am in general accord with the governance plans set out in the bill, I believe that the long history of disputes over the design and implementation of this project make it unusually important that a single agency - with appropriate input from all participants - have a clearly defined leadership role in each phase of the project. To do

otherwise raises a serious risk that the planning and implementation will not be completed in a reasonable timeframe.

Finally, the bill does not provide any assurance that the studies necessary to complete the LRT analysis will be performed, or that the problems raised with the current ridership studies will be resolved.

I have a strong commitment to funding and constructing the most efficient public transit systems possible, and I view the LRT proposal against that framework. I do not have a predisposition either toward or against LRT. This is a numbers issue. If the studies show LRT to be the most cost-effective use of transit dollars in the corridor involved, the project should move forward, and move forward at the earliest possible time. If the studies are negative, transit funds should be invested in other projects which move more people more cost-effectively.

The one thing that is clear, however, is that continued protracted debate on this issue serves no one's purpose. The time has come to bring that debate to closure, something that cannot be accomplished without completion of some basic studies, and the definition of a governance plan. As a consequence, it is my intention to introduce, at the start of the next session, legislation which will:

- include a governance procedure similar to that proposed in the current bill.
- mandate the completion of a cost benefit alternative study, and a new ridership study based on updated origin and destination analyses; completion of these studies should provide decision makers with the data necessary to reach a final decision on the LRT option. While I feel strongly that the planning studies necessary to make that decision must be completed, I will not permit opponents to kill the proposal by "studying it to death."
- require estimates of the system's subsidy needs, and the source from which those subsidies will be paid, and
- provide funding for the mandated studies, and place tight timelines on their completion.

The LRT issue needs to be driven to resolution, and it is my sincere hope that this legislation will enable Minnesota to make a final "build - no build" decision in the next biennial session.