



*Protecting, restoring and enhancing the metro
Mississippi River and its watershed since 1993.*

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October 17, 2023

Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger
Minnesota Department of Transportation
95 John Ireland Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Commissioner Daubenberger:

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) appreciates this opportunity to share our support for converting Interstate 94 from a freeway to an at-grade boulevard.

FMR is a non-profit organization with a mission to engage community members and other stakeholders to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities Region. We represent thousands of people in the metropolitan area who care deeply about the river, including over 6,000 who participate as FMR advocates, volunteers, and members each year.

The Mississippi River is a natural, cultural, and historic wonder that helps define our metro area. In recognition of this, its 72-mile stretch through the Twin Cities is not only a state-designated Critical Area but also a national park afforded special protective policies.

Our urban built environment is part of the riverfront's character, but also a source of pollution. Carbon emissions, noise, road salt, and stormwater runoff are just some of the many ways in which we've damaged the river and the plants and animals that live in it and along its shores. I-94 crosses the river over the only gorge on the entire Mississippi River—a rare area that offers some of the most important habitat and recreational space on the river.

From the day planning began, I-94 has also inflicted tremendous harm on some of Minneapolis and St. Paul's most marginalized residents. In neighborhoods suffering from racism, redlining, and environmental injustice, MnDOT deepened these wounds by building a freeway that destroyed vibrant neighborhoods and increased pollution. Generations of residents have had their health, wealth, and cultural connections stolen from them due to this legacy that has yet to be repaired.

In light of this damage that I-94 has inflicted on our environment and our communities, we urge MnDOT to fully embrace freeway removal, such as At-Grade Alternatives A and B or the Twin

Cities Boulevard vision, as the preferred Rethinking I-94 alternative. This conversion should be pursued with urgency; climate change makes it clearer than ever that we can't afford to wait to remediate the damage being wrought by past agency decisions.

We also support the goals of Reconnect Rondo and believe that freeway-to-boulevard conversion could help bring justice, restoration, and cultural and economic vitality to Rondo residents and descendants who were so harmed by I-94's construction.

In this vein, we also encourage MnDOT to expand its Rethinking I-94 vision beyond the project's current boundaries. North Minneapolis, in particular, has been harmed by how the freeway has severed the community's access to the Mississippi River and inflicted pollution upon the neighborhood.

As the Upper Harbor Terminal project catalyzes more redevelopment along the North Minneapolis riverfront, improving community access across the I-94 trench will help this redevelopment be an authentic reflection and extension of the Northside rather than the North Loop. Without this reconnection, North Minneapolis residents are less likely to be the primary beneficiaries of a restored, deindustrialized, and economically vibrant riverfront.

MnDOT created this harm, and MnDOT can help repair it. Our planet and our neighborhoods deserve timely, decisive investment to remove this freeway and remediate its damages. We ask you to act now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colleen O'Connor Toberman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Colleen O'Connor Toberman
Land Use & Planning Director

cc:

Chair Charlie Zelle, Metropolitan Council
Melissa Barnes, MnDOT