



2020 City of Ramsey Legislative Platform

1. **Top Priority: U.S. Highway 10 Priority Projects**

ISSUE: U.S. Highway 10 is a principal arterial roadway providing significant transportation connections from Minneapolis – St. Paul to the northwest suburbs and Greater Minnesota. The 4-lane roadway (Anoka/Sherburne County line to the Rum River in Anoka) carries average daily traffic volumes ranging from 33,500 to 61,000 vehicles per day.

This corridor is commonly congested and has much higher than average crash and crash severity rates than comparable corridors. In addition, the corridor has four signalized intersections and numerous direct access points (14.5 per mile); which contribute to the degradation of the U.S. Highway 10. Over the past ten (10) years, thirteen (13) people have died in crashes on this 7-mile corridor. Four (4) fatalities were pedestrians; including (3) from 2013 to 2014.

Highway 10 has been studied numerous times over the past decade, each time a full-freeway status was identified as the ultimate solution. However, due to limited funding opportunities at the State and Federal level, full-freeway status would be difficult to achieve within the next 20 years.

As a result of funding constraints, MnDOT and Bolton & Menk completed a study to achieve freeway-like status for U.S. Highway 10 in the fall of 2014. This study is known as: *The U.S. Highway 10 Access Planning Study*. This study achieves 90% of the safety and operational benefits of a full-freeway for 50% of the cost. The intent of this study is to identify high-benefit improvements that are fiscally responsible so that improvements can be funded, programmed, and implemented incrementally. This study has been formally adopted by MnDOT, Anoka County, the City of Anoka and the City of Ramsey.

The City has recently completed a 2019 preliminary engineering and design study of the Highway 10 corridor in Ramsey and has identified preferred design solutions for the two remaining intersections (Sunfish Lake Boulevard and Ramsey Boulevard), plus the inter-connecting system of frontage roads. This study has identified the total cost of necessary improvement to be approximately \$138 million. This project is a high priority for the City and we are working with Anoka County and MNDOT to shape a specific legislative request.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A. Included in the U.S. Highway 10 Access Planning Study is a recommended, prioritized, list of improvement projects. The City of Ramsey recommends State and Federal funding sources be secured to implement both “immediate” and “short-term” priority projects.
- B. The City of Ramsey’s general position on U.S. Highway 10 is more resources must be dedicated to all components of the State’s transportation system, and local units of government must have access to resources and funding tools to meet growing needs.
- C. The City of Anoka has secured the funding needed to complete the Thurston/Fair Oak Interchange Project. Consequently, the City of Ramsey supports efforts to secure funding for rail and road improvements at Sunfish Lake Boulevard and at Ramsey Boulevard, and an additional lane of traffic to Round Lake Boulevard in Coon Rapids.
- D. The City of Ramsey’s position on rail crossing improvements along U.S. Highway 10 is the City opposes legislation and policies that disproportionately shift authority, costs, and/or liability away from railroad companies and onto local units of government. Additionally, the City supports funding for separation of rail-vehicle traffic as a critical matter of public safety and congestion.

2. Local Government Aid (LGA) and Fiscal Disparities

Local Government Aid for Ramsey has fluctuated (see chart below) from a high of \$396,382 in 2001, to the current level of \$0 in 2017. The basic formula was changed in 2014 and some level of LGA was restored for the next three years (approximately \$100,000 per year), however the same formula has now resulted in the elimination of all LGA for Ramsey and similar developing suburbs.

FY 2000 - \$359,771

FY 2001 - \$396,382

FY 2002 - \$303,894

FY 2003 through 2013 - \$0

FY 2014 - \$91,381

FY 2015 - \$110,352

FY 2016 - \$111,311

FY 2017 - \$0

FY 2018 - \$0

FY 2019 - \$0

Fiscal Disparities: Former Anoka State Legislator Charles R. Weaver originally authored fiscal disparities legislation in 1971. It was created for the purposes of:

1. Providing a way for local governments to share in the resources generated by the growth of the metropolitan area without removing existing resources;
2. Promoting orderly development of the region by reducing the impact of fiscal considerations on the location of business and infrastructure;
3. Establishing incentives for all parts of the area to work for the growth of the area as a whole;
4. Helping communities at various stages of development; and
5. Encouraging protection of the environment by reducing the impact of fiscal considerations to ensure protection of parks, open space, and wetlands.

Fiscal Disparities affects cities, counties, special taxing districts, and school districts within the seven-county metro area. It has reduced tax base disparity throughout the seven-county metropolitan area to a level of 3-to-1 (instead of the previous 10-to-1). Historically, the City of Ramsey (and Anoka County) have been net recipients of fiscal disparities funding. Meaning, the amount of dollars Ramsey receives from the program is greater than the dollars Ramsey contributes to the program.

RECOMMENDATION:

Ramsey supports revision of the LGA formula that recognizes the needs of developing suburbs and restores LGA to developing suburbs for long-term capital needs.

Any future legislation that would modify or impact the Fiscal Disparities program should only be considered within a framework of comprehensive reform efforts of the State's property tax, aids and credits system. Any proposed legislation that would modify or impact the Fiscal Disparities program must be evaluated utilizing the criteria of fairness, equity, stability, transparency and coherence in the treatment of cities and taxpayers across the metropolitan region, and must continue to serve the program's intended purposes.

The Ramsey City Council is in support of the Fiscal Disparities program. The Ramsey City Council opposes future diversion from the Fiscal Disparities Program to fund programs or projects that would contradict the purpose of the program. The City does not support efforts to exempt Ramsey (or Anoka County) from any future Fiscal Disparity program amendment discussions.

3. Funding for Non-State Aid City Streets

ISSUE: Minnesota has over 141,000 miles of roadway, and more than 22,500 miles—or 16 percent—are owned and maintained by Minnesota’s 853 cities. The Minnesota Constitution limits eligibility for dedicated Highway User Tax Distribution Fund dollars to up to twenty percent of streets in cities with populations over 5,000 (147 of 853 cities). This means almost 85 percent of municipal streets are ineligible for municipal state aid (MSA) funds and must be paid for with property taxes and special assessments. Funding challenges are compounded by city cost participation requirements in state and county highway projects, which divert resources from city-owned streets.

Recognizing the unique street funding needs in cities under 5,000 population, the 2015 legislature created the Small Cities Assistance Account (Minn. Stat. § 162.145). Funds in the account are distributed through a formula to all cities under 5,000 population for street maintenance and reconstruction. Unfortunately, funding for the account was only provided for one year.

Maintenance costs increase as road systems age, and no city—large or small—is spending enough on roadway capital improvements to maintain a 50-year lifecycle. For every one dollar spent on maintenance, a road authority—and therefore taxpayers—save seven dollars in repairs. According to a report released in late 2012 by the governor’s Transportation Finance Advisory Committee, cities collectively need an additional \$400 million per year to bring city streets up to an economically competitive standard.

RECOMMENDATIONS: City streets are a separate but integral piece of the network of roads supporting movement of people and goods. Cities need greater resources and flexible policies in order to meet growing demands for street improvements and maintenance. The City of Ramsey supports:

- A. dedicated and sustainable state funding source for non-MSA city streets in large and small cities statewide;
- B. enabling legislation that would allow cities to create street improvement districts (similar to stormwater districts or sidewalk improvement districts already allowed under Minn. Stat. § 435.44);
- C. and the creation of a new fund within the Local Road Improvement Program that would provide grants to cities burdened by cost participation requirements related to trunk highway and county state-aid projects.

4. Water Supply

ISSUE: A clean and reliable source of water is critical to the function of any healthy community. In many cases, communities utilize aquifers as their primary source of water. The City of Ramsey is located in a “recharge zone” for aquifers utilized throughout the Twin Cities Metro region, known as the “Anoka County Sand Plain.”

The City of Ramsey is a developing community and anticipates significant growth over the next two decades. As a result, additional water supply will be required to meet the demand of future development. In 2007, the City of Ramsey conducted a pilot study to explore the ability to use surface waters, such as the Mississippi River for a municipal water supply as a possible benefit for regional water resources. The Minnesota DNR assisted with this effort in order to identify options for preserving existing, and future, ground water supplies of communities throughout the entire Twin Cities Metro region.

As a result, the City of Ramsey identified an option of using a surface water treatment plant sometime in the future, which would draw from the Mississippi River, but only if it were part of a regional solution. Under a surface water option, the City would retain its ground water supply system as a back-up to a surface water supply. The estimated cost of the proposed surface water treatment plant in Ramsey was significant, at \$36.5 million. Costs for retaining the ground water supply system will be minimal compared to the treatment facility costs. For this reason, significant funding from outside the City would be required.

Clearly, utilization of water resources is not solely a local issue, as aquifers and “recharging zones” span across the entire Twin Cities metro region. The need for the City of Ramsey to switch from a ground water system to a surface water system is not a result of development in the City of Ramsey alone; it is the result of demand across the entire Twin Cities metro region. The City is currently participating in a multi-city feasibility study of a shared surface water treatment plant, and is opposed to any solution that requires expenditures of the City of Ramsey to be greater than the anticipated groundwater system.

RECOMMENDATION: The City of Ramsey supports continued regional analysis and planning efforts to utilize ground and surface water throughout the Twin Cities as a whole, rather than community-by-community. The City of Ramsey opposes actions limiting the ability of Ramsey to develop in order to sustain, or allow new development, in other Twin Cities communities affected by the Anoka County Sand Plain “recharge zone.” The City of Ramsey supports regional solutions to address regional ground water supply concerns; specifically including, regional equitable funding sources, is opposed to any solution that requires expenditures of the City of Ramsey to be greater than the anticipated groundwater system.

5. Administering Absentee Balloting

ISSUE: Eligible voters in Minnesota may vote by absentee ballot prior to Election Day. Starting 46 days before the election, a voter can request an application for an absentee ballot and if approved, receive and cast an absentee ballot in one visit to their county or city election offices. Ballots can also be requested, applied for and received by mail and returned by the voter to the election office by 3:00 pm on Election Day or by 8:00 pm on Election Day if delivered by mail or package delivery. Absentee balloting results are not known until combined with polling place results when the polls close on Election Day. For those voting absentee in - person, the absentee ballot application process is burdensome and confusing as voters expect the same process they encounter in their polling place on Election Day. The application process should be replaced by having the voter verify their identity on a paper or electronic roster. Currently electronic signatures are not allowed by state law; having the authority to use electronic signatures would make the process more efficient. Streamlining the voter check-in procedures would increase efficiency and decrease the time voters spend in line waiting to cast their absentee ballot. Seven days before Election Day, elections administrators can begin processing absentee ballots received by mail and in-person absentee voters can place their ballots directly into a tabulator. Currently, a voter can request to place their ballot in a series of envelopes similar to those returned by mail to be processed after they have left the building. Following legislative changes in 2016 allowing voters to place their ballot into a tabulator, few, if any, voters request to place their ballot into envelopes. State law allows alternative sites for conducting absentee balloting but requires that these sites remain open for the full 46 days prior to Election Day. Because of the increase in voting before Election Day, cities should have the authority to conduct in-person absentee balloting in alternative sites for the time period during which voters are allowed to place their ballots directly into a tabulator. Additionally, to respond to the voter demand to vote early, this time period should be increased from seven to 14 days before Election Day. Current law allows for in-person absentee voting until 5:00 p.m. on the day before Election Day. This does not leave adequate time for election officials to process absentee ballots, prepare supplemental lists indicating which voters have already cast absentee ballots and deliver the lists to precincts prior to opening of the polls on Election Day. The current absentee voting process further requires that additional supplemental lists of final absentee voters be delivered to the polls after the last mail delivery on Election Day and often leads to administrative challenges and increased potential for errors in the process. As more and more voters choose to vote early with absentee balloting, improvements must be made to increase efficiency of administering absentee balloting before Election Day, reduce the potential for errors, and to improve voter experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A. Replacing the in-person absentee ballot application process with paper or electronic rosters similarly to those used in polling places on Election Day and allow voters to use an electronic signature for electronic rosters;
- B. Eliminating the option to place an in-person absentee ballot in a series of envelopes instead of a tabulator;
- C. Increasing the time period that an in-person absentee voter can place their ballot directly into a tabulator from seven to 46 days;
- D. Allowing alternative in-person absentee voting sites to be established for 14 days prior to Election Day instead of the full 46 days currently required by state law;
- E. Establishing an earlier deadline for ending in-person absentee voting; and
- F. Revising absentee ballot regulations to allow any person 18 and older to witness the absentee process and sign the envelope as a witness.
- g. Authorizing cities with health care facilities to schedule election judges to conduct absentee voting at an earlier date in health care facilities.
- h. Consider cost/benefit to local communities in any changes made to the voting process.

6. Metropolitan Council Governance

ISSUE: The issue of Metropolitan Council governance was an issue raised in 2016 in which the City adopted a resolution taking the position outlined below. Since this is an issue that is likely to continue into 2019, including this in the 2020 *Legislative Platform* acts to reaffirm the City's previous position that was adopted in March of 2016.

Background: This topic was reviewed by the City Council at work session on April 23, 2016, and brought forward to the Council with modifications reflecting that discussion.

Over the last couple of years, Anoka County and three other metropolitan counties, formed a coalition that is advocating for a change in the structure of the Metropolitan Council. As part of that meeting, the Council received documents explaining the County position, and documents outlining the position of the Metro Cities organization.

Below are the points/observations put together by staff for consideration:

- Staff supports consideration of options for a Metropolitan Council governance structure that may increase accountability and address concerns of regional stakeholders and policy makers.
- Staff believes that there should be opportunities for local communities to provide input on ideas before any legislative change in Metropolitan Council governance is made.
- Staff recognizes the support Metropolitan Council has provided for past projects in the City of Ramsey:
 - Parking Ramp
 - Sunwood Drive
 - Center Street
 - Sunwood Townhomes (TH 47)
 - Sunwood Village
 - The Draw Park and Amphitheater
 - Rail Station
- The Metropolitan Council has provided support for the planning and implementation of future projects:
 - Mississippi Skyway
 - Housing projects in The COR
 - Housing projects within the community as a whole
- The City of Ramsey expects to continue an ongoing partnership with the Metropolitan Council, especially as we endeavor upon updating our Comprehensive Plan.
- Staff recognizes that the Metropolitan Council has made progress toward making the current Comprehensive Plan Update and Amendment processes more user friendly.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A. That reform to the Metropolitan Council should ensure that the Metropolitan Council is a responsible, responsive, and accountable partner for regional development and progress; and
- B. That in order to recognize the responsibility that the Metropolitan Council has to local units of government, local governments shall have a decision role in the appointment process for representatives to the Metropolitan Council; and
- C. That in order to promote the stability and continuity of governance, the terms of office for Metropolitan Council members shall be staggered.

7. Zip Code (Federal Issue/USPS)

ISSUE: United States Postal Service (USPS) provides the City of Ramsey postal services from the Anoka Post Office, located near downtown Anoka (55303 Zip Code). For the past decade, the City of Ramsey and the Ramsey Economic Development Authority (EDA), have identified a need for the Ramsey to secure a unique zip code and post office. This item has been identified a priority for two major reasons (1) confusion by businesses, residents, and visitors about differentiating the City of Ramsey from the City of Anoka; which results in problems in multiple applications, and (2) degradation of community identity.

From an equity perspective, when the City of Ramsey is compared to nearby communities that do have zip codes/ post offices, the City of Ramsey appears to be a unique outlier in terms of current population. The City of Ramsey is one of twelve nearby cities with a current population of over 12,000 that does not have a unique post office and zip code. There are seven cities located nearby the City of Ramsey with populations ranging from 466 to 7,000 that have a unique post office and zip code. With current population comparisons in mind, it should be noted that the City of Ramsey is a rapidly growing community with several hundred acres of land available for future development. The demand for USPS services is expected to continuously increase with time.

RECOMMENDATION: In order for the City of Ramsey to move forward with a request to USPS for a new post office and zip code, the City of Ramsey needs to document clear and consistent support from local business and local officials. Therefore, the City of Ramsey supports the solicitation of letters of support from local business, residents, County, State, and Federal elected officials for the purpose of advocating for a Ramsey-unique zip code via the USPS Northland District Manager.