



October 7, 2002

Acting Commissioner Douglas Weiszhaar
Minnesota Department of Transportation
Transportation Building
395 John Ireland Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1899

Dear Acting Commissioner Weiszhaar:

The Hiawatha Light Rail Community Advisory Committee (CAC) discussed pedestrian safety and bus circulation at its September 25th meeting. Originally the issue centered on the 38th Street and 46th Street crossings, but quickly evolved into a general discussion of the excessive speed and dangerous conditions that exist along the light rail line where it parallels Highway 55. Highway 55 is also a serious impediment to potential development identified in the Lake Street and 46th Street master plans.

Experience around the country shows that the pedestrian friendliness of areas along a light rail corridor, especially stations, is critical for the success of a light rail line. It enhances foot and bike traffic, encourages greater ridership and transit-oriented development. Traffic traveling 50+ mph just yards from light rail stations poses danger for pedestrians, bicyclists and bus riders who want to cross Hiawatha to any of the stations south of Lake Street. Developers will view the highway as severing half of their potential markets; only auto-oriented developers will see the highway as bringing potential customers to their businesses.

In 1976, the Hiawatha Avenue Design Advisory Committee recommended building Hiawatha as a four-lane boulevard. That recommendation has been stretched to the limit with the current design speed of 50 mph. Using the 85th percentile may be appropriate when a corridor is designed exclusively for cars. But to maximize our investment in LRT the corridor itself must safely accommodate multiple modes, not just cars as it does today. Thus, various features must be redesigned to bring about more reasonable speeds. Engineers who successfully design roads for 50+ mph can also design roads for lower speeds and we challenge them to do so on Highway 55.

To promote transit-oriented development and pedestrian safety, the CAC has in the past made recommendations to MnDOT - most of which have been ignored. Free right turns that pose significant hazards to pedestrians and bicyclists, median strips that are too narrow to protect pedestrians in winter from the spray of passing cars and trucks and inadequate marking of crosswalks have all been issues raised previously.

The CAC again requests that MnDOT end free-right turns, widen the medians and enhance the marking of the crosswalks.

New recommendations include:

- maintain a speed limit of 35 mph,
- strict enforcement of that 35 mph speed limit,
- rumble strips before a car arrives at an intersection,
- speed bumps attuned to a car going 35 mph (but no more) just before reaching a crosswalk,
- bump outs at crosswalks, and
- longer crosswalk times.

Without these changes on Highway 55, much of the potential of our investment in light rail will be lost. The station area plan for 46th Street calls for 500 units of new housing. These families, children and seniors will have to cross 46th Street and Highway 55 to access the light rail station. An auto throughput chart must not jeopardize their safety.

Highway 55 should not be a transportation benefit for cars alone at the expense of light rail and those who live near it.

Minnesota's first light rail corridor presents an opportunity for MnDOT to think outside the auto-oriented box. Please ask your engineers to consider and report back on the CAC's recommendations. We welcome other suggestions to slow traffic and increase pedestrian safety along TH 55 in the Hiawatha Corridor.

A response would be greatly appreciated at or before the November 20th CAC meeting. To secure time on the agenda, please contact Jennifer Lovaasen at 651-602-1493.

Sincerely,



Carol Kummer
Chair of the Hiawatha Light Rail CAC

cc: Hiawatha Light Rail Community Advisory Committee
Hiawatha Light Rail Corridor Management Committee
Bob Winter, MnDOT