

Chairwoman Smith and Administrator Fernandez, thank you for the opportunity to address the importance of investing in a strong transit network. My name is Grace Waltz, and I am the Vice President of Public Policy at the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce. The Minneapolis Regional Chamber is the largest local chamber in Minnesota with nearly 2,300 members in the 11-county metro region. Over the past ten years, the Minneapolis Regional Chamber and our partners have commissioned two studies from national experts to assess the expected return on investment from building out our region's transit system. These reports have confirmed that in addition to providing more and better ways to get around, investments in transit pay off, both for those who use transit, and those who use our roads and highways. Building a comprehensive transit system in our metro area will provide a major return on investment – more than \$9 billion in positive direct impacts. Improved public transit is a key component to eliminating access barriers to equitable employment and economic disparities. Employers and employees have been seeking better transit, and this report shows that it is the smart thing to do from a monetary perspective. It is also important to note that our most recent study found that 81 percent of the benefits of a better transit system would be enjoyed by people and businesses using the region's street and highway system due to reduced traffic, thus avoiding inconveniences like shipping delays and long daily commutes.

Beyond the clear economic benefits, public support for improved transit access is incredibly high. A 2018 poll commissioned by the Minneapolis Regional Chamber showed that 74 percent of all respondents said they would support the State of Minnesota making additional investments in transit, including buses, trains and light rail. There is also strong support for making transit easier to use. 58 percent said that they would like to use public transit such as rail or buses more often, but it is not convenient to or available from their home or work. Nearly two-thirds believe that transit is necessary to compete with other metro areas for jobs. 64 percent said that Minneapolis-Saint Paul needs a better regional transit system in order to compete for jobs with peer cities such as Denver, Salt Lake City, Dallas, and Portland that have more complete transit systems. These results make it clear that Minnesotans recognize that transit is good for our economy and their day to day lives, making our state stronger and more competitive.

It also must be noted that the way we think about our transit systems looks different than it did just 17 months ago. The COVID-19 pandemic and shift to remote work decimated demand for public transit in the Twin Cities and across the country. While some companies have begun the process of bringing their workers back to the office, continued uncertainty has delayed the return to office for many companies, and there continue to be some who may never bring their workers back to pre-pandemic levels.

As we think about the transit system of the future, we need to think about building systems that are more than about getting people to and from work – we need systems that allow people to use transit to go to a doctor's appointment, the grocery store, out to dinner, or to a sporting event. To put it plainly, it's no longer enough to build a system that only gets people from Point A to Point B. We need a system that gets people from Point A, to C, to D, E, and F, back to A again.

Federal, state and local leaders recognize that we are at a unique moment in time when it comes to making innovative investments. There is momentum for transit investments here in Minnesota that strengthen our economy and make our state an even better place for businesses and employees. Investment in transit is a true win-win that helps more people live their lives, get to their jobs, providing benefits to everyone in the region. We know that businesses prefer to locate near transit where employees and customers will have more travel options. Investing in transit now will generate positive impacts for our economy for decades, including additional state and local tax revenues of nearly the same magnitude as the investment costs – \$143 million a year or \$2.86 billion over 20 years.

Economic benefits aside, the recent United Nations climate report painted a terrifying picture of what is to come if we do not change the way we treat the planet, and transit plays a major role in a cleaner future. Over this past summer Minnesotans have witnessed the devastating impacts of climate change in our own backyards, which is to say nothing of the impacts in other parts of the country and around the world.

The Minneapolis Regional Chamber has been advocating strongly for transit investments – and this ROI information only strengthens our resolve and desire to make this happen. We are hopeful that policymakers will recognize the significant benefits that comes with transit and will make smart choices in support of investments that benefit our economy, employees, and everyone in the region. Thank you for focusing on this very important issue.