

Minnesota businesses need transit, and we need it now

As CEOs of the Twin Cities' major employers, we ask legislators to seize this opportunity.

By Richard Davis, Scott Wine and Doug Baker | MAY 6, 2016 — 11:50PM

As major employers in the Twin Cities region, we have a vested interest in helping to ensure that our region is growing and evolving to meet the needs of our employees, customers, patients and communities we care for — now and into the future.

We are therefore calling on the state Legislature to make a comprehensive investment in our overall infrastructure by passing a bipartisan transportation funding bill this year. To us, comprehensive means money for roads, bridges and transit.

Collectively, we employ more than 100,000 people in the region. Many of them rely daily on public transit to get to work, to school and to other opportunities. In fact, according to transit surveys, 80 percent of public transit riders are commuting to work or school and both are increasingly linked to a person's long-term health outcomes.

And the demand for transit is only increasing.

Estimates show that our region will add around 750,000 people over the next 25 years. Many will be the younger workers all businesses are looking to attract. And they are driving less and choosing transit more frequently. A Rockefeller survey showed that young workers consider transit to be a quality-of-life factor that draws them to a region to live or work. Gone are the days of moving to a city or region because of work; today's young workers choose first where they want to live, and then seek a job in that location.

What this means for business is that our region needs to be an attractive place to live — and that means access to affordable and convenient transit options.

The good news is that our region has already invested in transit, and several valuable projects are underway to expand access to additional communities. However, state funding is critical to ensure that those projects can be completed. The Green Line Extension (Southwest light-rail line), the Orange Line bus rapid transit (including the completion of the Interstate 35W access project), the Blue Line Extension (Bottineau light-rail line), the Gold Line bus rapid transit, and dozens of bus lines all depend on new transit funding.

These are transit lines that travel through some of the densest areas of the region, rich with current and future jobs. The planned lines would put 500,000 more people within a 30-minute commute from work. They would provide a faster, more reliable option for workers who don't want to sit in traffic on a snowy day or don't want to buy a car to live and work here.

State funding is also critical to leveraging federal dollars.

Right now, there are more than a billion dollars on the table from the federal government to realize these transit projects. These federal funds cannot be used for roadway or highway systems, and we will receive them only if the state dedicates its portion of local funding.

These are federal dollars that will help create thousands of local jobs, while having a significant positive impact on suppliers, subcontractors and contractors in the construction industry.

The state's investment is small compared with what the federal government is willing to dedicate. For example, on the Green Line Extension, securing the remaining \$135 million in state funding leverages \$895 million in federal funding. When you add in the county

and city funds dedicated to the project, the state will receive \$9 in federal and local support for every \$1 invested.

Wise investments in transit are worth making.

Passing a comprehensive transportation bill that includes transit is critical in this session. If the state doesn't act to provide funding for these projects, these federal dollars will go to a transit project in another state. Failure to act this year also means some of these projects will be in jeopardy.

The business community can't afford to miss out on this investment. Neither can the health of our communities, our region or the state of Minnesota. We hope state lawmakers will take action to ensure the best future for our region.

Richard Davis is CEO of U.S. Bank. Scott Wine is CEO of Polaris. Doug Baker is CEO of Ecolab. This article was also submitted on behalf of the following CEOs: Penny Wheeler, Allina Health; Hubert Joly, Best Buy; Robert I. Bonar Jr., Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota; Ken Powell, General Mills; Chris Policinski, Land O'Lakes; David Mortenson, Mortenson Construction; Brian Cornell, Target; David Kvamme, Wells Fargo Minnesota, and Ben Fowke, Xcel Energy.