



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
1st Quarter Meeting  
February 9, 2024 • 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.  
Hybrid – Zoom and Centennial Office Building Meeting Room 101**

**DRAFT AGENDA**

- |                  |  |   |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>2:00 p.m.</b> | <b>Welcome &amp; Introductions</b>   | Housley/All   |
| <b>2:10 p.m.</b> | <b>Approve Today's Agenda &amp; Minutes from 11/16/23</b>  | Housley/All   |
| <b>2:15 p.m.</b> | <b>Informational Presentations</b><br>- Aitkin River Trails Committee  | Kathleen Ryan   |
| <b>2:30 p.m.</b> | <b>Commission Business</b><br>- Budget Report<br>- Executive Committee – Support Letter Authority<br>- MN-MRPC Priorities  | Packet/Lewis/Miller<br>Executive Committee/All<br>Executive Committee |
| <b>2:45 p.m.</b> | <b>National MRPC</b><br>- Annual Meeting in Minnesota – 2024 or 2025?<br>- Board Updates<br>- Committee Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Communications &amp; Marketing</li><li>o Culture &amp; Heritage</li><li>o Environment, Recreation &amp; Agriculture</li><li>o Transportation</li></ul> | Executive Committee/All<br>Board Members<br>Committee Members         |
| <b>3:20 p.m.</b> | <b>Commission Projects</b><br>- Drive the Great River Road Month 2024<br>- MN GRR Print Maps   | Wilson/Planning Team<br>Executive Committee/All                       |
| <b>3:35 p.m.</b> | <b>Public Utility Projects Near Great River Road</b><br>- Northland Reliability Project - Update<br>- Dairyland Wabasha Relocation Project - Update<br>- Lotis Environmental Bowstring Project - Update<br>- Scenic Easement Information/Mapping<br>- Other  | Packet<br>Packet/Review Team<br>Packet/Miller<br>Zoff<br>All          |
| <b>4:00 p.m.</b> | <b>Letter of Support Request</b><br>- Brainerd TH 210/Lum Park Bridge Project  | All   |
| <b>4:10 p.m.</b> | <b>Commission Member Updates</b><br>- Refer to Written Updates in Packet<br>- Brief Highlights or Action Requests  | All<br>All  |
| <b>4:25 p.m.</b> | <b>Other Business</b>  |   |
| <b>4:30 p.m.</b> | <b>Wrap Up and Adjourn</b>   |   |



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
4th Quarter Meeting – November 16, 2023  
Capitol Room 123/Zoom Hybrid  
MINUTES – Draft**

**Commissioners Present**

Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd  
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River  
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings  
Kate Carlson – Hastings to Iowa Border  
Sen. John Hoffman  
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture Appointee  
Lisa Havelka – Tourism Appointee  
David Kelliher – Historical Society Appointee  
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources Appointee  
Marni Karnowski – Transportation Appointee  
Anne Lewis – At-Large Member

Carol Zoff – Transportation  
Peter MacDonagh - Transportation  
Diane Henry Wangenstein – LCC  
Megan Voelke - LCC  
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

**Members Absent**

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids  
Sen. Karin Housley  
Rep. Sydney Jordan  
Rep. Leigh Finke  
Tucker Blythe – National Park Service

**Technical Advisors/Staff Present**

Kelli Bruns – Natural Resources

**Guest Present**

Christina Iliev, MN Department of Agriculture

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The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by Vice Chair John Anfinson, followed by introductions. A quorum was present.

**Presentation of MRPC Stewardship Award to Minnesota Grown/Minnesota Department of Agriculture:**

National MRPC Pilot Pro Tem/MN-MRPC Vice Chair John Anfinson announced that Minnesota attendees were honored to accept the MRPC Stewardship Award on behalf of Minnesota Grown, at the recent MRPC Annual Meeting in Alton/Collinsville, Illinois. The award recognizes Minnesota Grown’s sponsorship and leadership of the Fall Harvest promotion for Drive the Great River Road Month but also the long-term MN-MRPC participation and partnership of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The Stewardship Award was presented to Christina Iliev and Paul Hugunin of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Ag Marketing and Development Division, with gratitude from the MRPC and MN-MRPC.

**Approve Agenda and Minutes from 8/17/23 and 10/16/23 Meetings:** Motion by Karl Samp and seconded by Paul Hugunin to approve the draft agenda and meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

**Budget Report:** The budget reports in the packet were referenced, one report showing final expenses for fiscal year 2022-23 and another showing expenses year to date for fiscal year 2023-24. Treasurer Anne Lewis provided an overview and noted that National MRPC dues will be paid in early 2024.

**MN-MRPC Priorities/Planning:** The Executive Committee will continue the discussion started at the August 17, 2023 MN-MRPC meeting. A meeting will be scheduled.

**MRPC 2023 Annual Meeting:** Attendees shared take aways from the meeting, which was held in September in Alton/Collinsville, Illinois. Anne Lewis reported on the pollinator partnership with Rotary International and projects that will be rolling out soon. Senator Hoffman noted the differences between states and their MRPC structure and funding and called out the Minnesota Commission’s exemplary organization due to its inclusion in statute and collaborative structure. Karl Samp mentioned the Minnesota structure difference whereby regional members are elected by stakeholders in those regions. Carol Zoff mentioned that all ten states had MRPC statutes in place at one time but not all have remained in effect. She also cited Minnesota’s legislative designation rather than an appointment process. John Anfinson reported that Wisconsin MRPC has secured operating funds for their Commission, including staffing. Peter MacDonagh thanked Senators Hoffman and Housley for attending and their commitment to the MRPC.

**Operation Pollination Resolution:** The MRPC adopted the Operation Pollination Resolution at the Annual Meeting. It is a non-binding resolution supporting Rotary International's initiatives to protect pollinators along the Mississippi River corridor. The recently signed resolution was included in the meeting packet and referenced. MN-MRPC discussion included a question on how Rotary will keep records and communicate accomplishments. John Anfinson will follow up with the Environment, Recreation & Agriculture Committee. A suggestion was made to invite a speaker on this topic to a future MN-MRPC meeting. Chris Miller will follow up. A motion was made by Anne Lewis for the MN-MRPC to endorse the MRPC language in the Operation Pollination Resolution, seconded by Grant Wilson. A roll call vote followed with all present voting in favor. Motion carried.

**MRPC Communications and Marketing Committee:** The committee has not met since the MRPC Annual Meeting.

**MRPC Culture and Heritage Committee:** John Anfinson reported that the committee has made important decisions including changing the process for review of Interpretive Center nominations to quarterly versus annually and working with nominees on strengthening of their materials prior to final consideration. A model nomination is also now available for sites interested. The committee approved the Discovery Park of America's nomination (Tennessee), and they are now a Great River Road Interpretive Center. The committee is continuing work with the Cold War Museum (Arkansas) and Wildlife Heritage Museum (Mississippi) on their nomination packages. The online nomination form has been taken down for modification, and changes are also being planned on the Interpretive Center visit checklist. Three more Interpretive Center nominations are expected soon.

**MRPC Environment, Recreation and Agriculture Committee:** The next meeting is scheduled for early December. It was noted that 2024 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge, providing an opportunity to partner on promotions.

**MRPC Transportation Committee:** Peter MacDonagh reported on the most recent meeting, held in Illinois during the MRPC Annual Meeting. The two main topics were Mississippi River Bicycle Trail (MRT) signage including trademark permission for the sign design; and plans to inventory Interpretive Center directional signage in all ten states. Questions and discussion followed on the process in Minnesota for Great River Road signage and sign replacement. The Great River Road is designated and signed in Minnesota by the Minnesota Department of Transportation working with local road authority partners and resolutions. The route was fully re-signed by MnDOT in 2018 with cooperative construction agreements defining that local authorities will handle replacements as needed.

**Drive the Great River Road Month 2023 Recap:** A report on the 2023 campaign was referenced in the meeting packet. Kate Carlson commented that the theme and approach provided a great way to work with Convention & Visitors Bureaus along the Great River Road and she sees benefit in continuing approaches from the campaign. Thanks were expressed to Kate Carlson and Megan Christianson for their leadership, followed by additional comments and questions on the 2023 campaign and discussion on possible themes for 2024. The consensus was to pursue an outdoor recreation theme including the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. The Department of Natural Resources will consider serving as the lead with assistance from the MN-MRPC office, with the Minnesota Historical Society, Department of Transportation and Department of Agriculture interested in participating. A suggestion was also made to consider partnering with other Scenic Byways in Minnesota. Members noted the DNR's "Get out More" and "I Can!" Initiatives, MNHS working on outdoor activities at historic sites, and the importance of reaching out to underserved groups.

**MN Great River Road Ambassador Program:** Next steps include planning to offer regular Ambassador Zoom sessions for CVBs/Chambers (minimum annually) to both provide information to new staff/leaders and roll out Drive the Great River Road Month information; and discussion with the Department of Natural Resources to ensure inclusion of new DNR offerings/efforts on the MN Great River Road website and in communications.

**Public Utilities Notifications – Overview and General Process:** Several notifications have been received recently. Examples of past MN-MRPC activity related to CapX 2020 project were listed in the meeting packet as reference, showing varying levels of comment and involvement dependent on impact and proximity of the project to the Great River Road. There was discussion on the process the MN-MRPC would like to use when notified of new public utility projects potentially impacting the Great River Road.

Process Comments and Recommendations:

- It would be helpful to have a template – the content in the proposed Northland Reliability Project letter could serve as such as a template especially for projects with relatively minor impacts.

- Talk with project proposers early in the process.
- MnDOT has developed an internal checklist listing information requested from potential projects. It is focused on MnDOT right-of-way issues, but modifications could be made for MN-MRPC use.
- The Northland Reliability Project letter content is useful because it reflects byway interests and doable project modifications.
- The National Scenic Byway Foundation recently held a webinar on protecting scenic viewsheds. A participant shared information on tower styles/designs to help address visual impact of transmission line towers. Examples could be gathered and shared at the next Commission meeting. There are likely to be more of these projects coming.
- A suggestion was made to request a meeting with staff from the Public Utilities Commission, to provide overview information about the Great River Road and byway interests, since multiple projects are underway and on the horizon.
- Focus on what we can uniquely provide – such as scenic viewshed, historic, and cultural considerations, etc. It would be helpful to provide Great River Road information to the PUC as suggested today as an overview for their consideration.

**Consider Comments - Northland Reliability Electric Transmission Project:** The current comment period for this electric transmission project closes on November 21. An overview was presented at the August 17 meeting. MN-MRPC reviewed and revised draft comments on October 16 related to possible impacts of the route on the Great River Road. Members reviewed the current draft and suggested a slight modification to separate information requests and mitigation recommendations; and add wording requesting that visual simulations include options that minimize visual impact. There was agreement on the edits. Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by David Kelliher to authorize the letter with modifications as suggested and submit before the end of the comment period. A roll call vote was taken with all present voting in favor. Motion carried.

**Consider MN-MRPC Next Steps – Dairyland Wabasha Relocation Project:** A pre-project meeting with MN-MRPC representatives has been requested. Members were asked to indicate interest in participating and there was discussion on MN-MRPC direction related to comments and content to be shared. John Anfinson, Marni Karnowski and Kate Carlson volunteered to meet with the project contacts. It was noted that this is an example of a small group being designated to gather information and provide initial information on byway interests, and that this might be a component of the Commission’s preferred process for other projects.

**Bowstring Telecommunications Power Project:** Project contacts have notified the MN-MRPC of intent for a telecommunications tower near Ball Club Lake and requested a response by November 17 if there are concerns. An overview and map were referenced in the meeting packet. Megan Christianson noted visual impact concerns but also the need for the communications tower in the local area. Visual impact concerns were discussed and camouflaged tower designs were suggested as possible mitigation. Tree-style options were mentioned. Motion by Karl Samp and seconded by Megan Christianson authorizing an email to the project proposers noting understanding of the need for the tower, concern about visual impact and suggesting mitigation via camouflage tower options. A roll call vote was taken with all members present voting in favor. Motion carried.

**Transportation Alternatives Projects:** Carol Zoff provided information about the Transportation Alternatives process, and referenced a list of ten potential projects in the Great River Corridor that would benefit the byway. Of 50 letters of intent received by MnDOT, ten were identified as being of benefit to the Great River Road as defined in the Corridor Management Plan. For any letters approved by the Commission, staff will reach out to the project contacts, offer the letters of support and work with the Chair to finalize and provide letters to those that proceed with funding applications. Letters focus on the projects’ connection to the MN-MRPC mission and Corridor Management Plan, following the process that has been used for the past few years. After review, motion by David Kelliher and seconded by Anne Lewis to authorize MN-MRPC letters of support for the ten projects listed. A roll call vote was taken with all members present voting in favor. Motion carried.

### **Member Updates**

- Karl Samp and Sally Fineday recently attended the Mississippi Headwaters Board Biennial Conference. Aitkin County is interested in efforts to cross promote trails with Crow Wing County. Regional Commissioners Samp and Christianson will follow up. John Anfinson mentioned outdoor exhibits at Tom Lee Park in Memphis as a possible example of outdoor interpretation for consideration.
- Karl Samp shared that 60 Minutes recently ran a story about the Delta Blues Museum, one of the Great River Road’s Interpretive Centers.

- Anne Lewis mentioned a recent Travel & Leisure article featuring the Great River Road - <https://www.travelandleisure.com/great-river-road-trip-7974364>
- Carol Zoff reported that the Office of Environmental Stewardship at MnDOT is repurposing space, she has been reviewing Great River Road files and historic information to archive and has been working with librarians at both the Department of Transportation and Minnesota Historical Society. Members were appreciative of this effort and suggested that some materials could potentially be used for an exhibit at a Minnesota Great River Road Interpretive Center if there would be interest.
- David Kelliher reported on a new exhibit now open at the Historic Fort Snelling Visitor Center that tells the story of the confluence and peoples and noted that the Visitor Center is open year-round making a great winter activity to consider.
- John Anfinson recently attended the National Parks Conservation Association meeting and noted the focus on indigenous voices in National Parks.

### **Next Meeting**

2024 meeting dates to be determined. More information to come.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:20 p.m.

## MN-MRPC FY 24 Activity Budget - Status as of 1/11/24

<u>Activity/Item</u>	<u>FY 24 Allocation</u>	<u>Spent 1/9/24</u>	<u>Pending</u>	<u>Remaining</u>	<u>% Spent</u>
Quarterly Meetings	\$5,500.00	\$586.03		\$4,913.97	11%
Other meetings including travel & per diem	\$1,500.00	\$1,064.99		\$435.01	71%
Dues & Memberships (MRPC - \$15,000; NSB Foundation \$150)	\$15,150.00	\$150.00		\$15,000.00	1%
National Meetings	\$10,000.00	\$3,722.94		\$6,277.06	37%
Communications including website hosting, phone, Zoom, Constant Contact, etc.	\$1,300.00	\$126.66	\$123.42	\$1,049.92	20%
Website Regular Maintenance Updates & New Arts Page	\$2,400.00	\$1,175.00		\$1,225.00	49%
Shipping (incl. Ambassador kits and maps)	\$1,000.00	\$972.79	\$81.27	-\$54.06	105%
General Material Printing & Supplies	\$750.00	\$143.87		\$606.13	19%
Admin Contract	\$38,400.00	\$16,000.00	\$3,200.00	\$19,200.00	50%
Professional-Technical Services - including additional staff hours, web services, graphic design services, etc.	\$2,000.00	\$3,900.00		-\$1,900.00	195%
<b>Total Operating Budget</b>	<b>\$78,000.00</b>	\$27,842.28	\$3,404.69	\$46,753.03	40%
Notes:					
Approx. \$4,200 should remain in the National Meetings line item, which could be utilized for other commission activities.					
Overage in Professional-Technical Services likely to be offset by funds remaining in Quarterly Meetings line item.					
Limited supply of maps (3,000) remains on hand for individual mailings, meetings and partner distribution. No plan for a new print run at this time but something to consider					



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
Executive Committee – January 23, 2024 – 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.  
Zoom and Centennial Office Building Room 101  
NOTES**

**Members Present:** Sen. Housley, John Anfinson, Anne Lewis, Lisa Havelka, Sally Fineday

**Technical Advisors & Staff Present:** Carol Zoff, Chris Miller, Diane Henry-Wangensteen, Yuki Kawahara

Chair Housley called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. A quorum was present.

**Letter of Support Requests:** The committee agreed to add this to the agenda after receipt of a request yesterday. The City of Sauk Rapids is requesting letters of support for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Pedestrian Railroad Crossing Safety Project and CSAH 3 at 6<sup>th</sup> and Summit Avenues Pedestrian Improvement Project, as they seek funds from the Active Transportation and Safe Routes to School Programs. These projects were approved by the MN-MRPC in November 2023 for letters of support related to possible Transportation Alternatives applications. Committee members were in favor of approving new letters because of the prior approval for the same projects and advised bringing this topic to the MN-MRPC to discuss and formalize Executive Committee authority for approvals between full Commission meetings in the future. Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by Sen. Housley to approve letters of support for the two Sauk Rapids projects described. Motion carried.

**FY 24 Budget Status Review:** A report showing year-to-date budget status was referenced in the meeting packet and background was provided. The current fiscal year ends June 30 and is the first year of the budget biennium so remaining funds can be carried forward into fiscal year 2025 which begins on July 1. There will be some funds remaining in the National Meetings (out of state travel) line item that could be re-allocated to other areas. Needs were discussed including maps, costs related to possible Annual Meeting hosting, Drive the Great River Road Month, and Interpretive Center visits. Questions were raised on whether print maps should continue to be a focus or if electronic information is a better focus. A smaller print piece with a QR code was also suggested. The committee recommended that additional discussion on print maps take place at an upcoming MN-MRPC meeting. Sen. Housley requested information on past costs involved with hosting an Annual Meeting.

**MRPC Annual Meeting:** John Anfinson shared that as of the last National MRPC Board Meeting, a host location had not been identified for the 2024 MRPC Annual Meeting. Since then, the National Office has noted that they would welcome Minnesota as a location for 2024. The committee discussed general timelines and tasks, along with MN-MRPC member schedules and commitments in the coming months. The committee recommended that the MN-MRPC offer to host the MRPC Annual Meeting in 2025 and will bring this recommendation to the February 9 Quarterly Meeting. 2024 could be considered if no other states are able to host. John will contact the National Office with this information requesting a response prior to the February 9 Quarterly Meeting to allow for consideration by the full MN-MRPC.

The committee discussed content and agenda structure of recent annual meetings, September timing, and need for sponsors. Alignment with the MN Drive the Great River Road Month theme was suggested (outdoor recreation for 2024). Site ideas were mentioned with considerations including proximity to Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge since they are celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**MN-MRPC Priorities & Projects:** The Committee reviewed the priorities listing and feedback received at the August 2023 meeting, along with new topics that have come up including potential hosting of the MRPC Annual Meeting, and public utility/transmission line projects impacting the Great River Road.

Discussion –

- Need to consider the time impacts and needs of projects.
- Drive the Great River Road Month promotions should continue.
- Regional Commissioners could be asked to complete Interpretive Center checklists/visits.
- A map reprint is directly connected to Interpretive Centers, as they are primary ambassadors and distribution locations.
- Interpretive Centers have indicated interest in the MN-MRPC convening joint group meetings periodically.
- Hosting a national MRPC meeting is a good opportunity to connect with and involve partners.

- Keep GRR Ambassador activities going but be mindful of the capacity to implement.
- It worked well to connect with CVBs and Chambers as Ambassadors in connection with Drive the Great River Road Month – continue and build on these efforts, also including Interpretive Centers.
- Important to review and comment on public utility/electric transmission line projects impacting the GRR – need to continue. There was discussion on scenic easements and how these might fit into MN-MRPC comments and recommendations. MnDOT is currently reviewing how to include this information on GIS mapping. An update will be provided at the February 9 MN-MRPC meeting.

Recommendations –

- Focus on list of current priorities at levels determined by capacity including commission members' availability, staff time and budget.
- Continue to respond to and comment on public utility projects impacting the Great River Road.
- Plan to host MRPC Annual Meeting in 2025, or 2024 if necessary. This will become a top priority and focus for a time.
- Revisit list of on-hold items later, as capacity and funding opportunities allow.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.





# 2023 MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING

— Illinois | Sept. 20-22, 2023

**Celebrating 85 years of the Great River Road and  
Drive the Great River Road Month**

## WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

- 3-5pm Board meeting - *Calhoun Meeting Room*
- 4-5:30pm Registration - *Lobby*
- 6-8pm Welcome Reception - Hors D' Oeuvres, Music and Beer & Wine  
*National Great Rivers Museum - 2 Locks & Dam Way, East Alton, IL*  
A shuttle bus will leave the hotel at 5:30pm and leave the Museum at 8pm to return to the hotel. You are welcome to take the shuttle or drive yourself (approximately 25-minute drive).

## THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

- 7:30am-12:15pm Registration - *Pre Function Hallway - outside Clinton Meeting Room*
- 7:45am New Member Orientation - Pilot Emeritus, Anne Lewis  
*Clinton Meeting Room*
- 8:30am-12:15pm Opening Morning Session - *Clinton Meeting Room*
- Pilot's Welcome - Norma Pruitt
  - IL Welcome - Illinois Mississippi River Parkway Commission
  - Annual Showcase - Susanne Thiede-Barnet, National Office
  - State Success Highlights - State Chairs
  - Sustainable Tourism Development Planning & Socioeconomic Observations Along the Great River Road - Dr. David Perkins
  - Made in Illinois - Daniel Thomas
  - Illinois Success Stories - Cory Jobe, JD Lorton, Mike Morrow and Kyle Moore
- 12:15-2:15pm Lunch and Bison Bridge Project - Chad Pregracke  
*Clinton Meeting Room*
- 2:30-4:30pm Technical Committee Meetings - *Clinton Meeting Room*
- 6-7pm Social Hour - Hors D' Oeuvres and Drinks - *Madison A & B*  
**Sponsored by Great Rivers Country**
- 7-9pm Celebration Banquet - *Madison A & B*
- Speaker: Colonel Andy Pannier
  - Recognition, Drawing and Stewardship Award

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22**

8:30am-Noon

Closing Session - *Clinton Meeting Room*

- Nominations Report & Elections - Pilot Emeritus, Anne Lewis
- Mississippi River Water Trail - Melissa Sauter
- Illinois Great River Road Transportation Update - John Paris
- Illinois' Investments in a Statewide Public EV Charging Network - Holly Bieneman
- Pollinator Playbook - Mike McClanahan
- Keep America Beautiful - Edmond McDavis III
- Mississippi River Country Update - Lyn Pilch, National Office
- Technical committee updates - Committee Chairs
- Closing Comments and Final Drawings - Norma Pruitt

***A special thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of this meeting, especially the Illinois-Mississippi River Parkway Commission, our knowledgeable and generous speakers, as well as the sponsoring organizations who went above and beyond to ensure a great time was had by all!***



# Drive the Great River Road Month - Minnesota

## Annual Baseline Activities

- Press release distributed to media list, partners/communities along the GRR, MN-MRPC members
- Facebook posts at varying levels
- Request Governor's Proclamation
- Promote National Great River Road contests

## 2023 Inspired: Amazing Art and Vibrant Vistas of the Great River Road

- Led by Regional Commissioners Kate Carlson & Megan Christianson
- Featured "top three" arts attractions submitted by communities (CVB or Chamber)
- Web landing page, Facebook posts, Ambassador launch session (Zoom), Ambassador kits – MN-MRPC
- Kick-Off announcement, information table and prize giveaway during Minnesota Marine Art Museum's "Mississippi Sippin" event.

## 2022 Follow the Great River Road to Fall Harvest Fun

- Sponsored, led and staffed by Minnesota Grown/MN Department of Agriculture
- Featured Minnesota Grown locations along/near the GRR and community attractions
- Web landing page, itineraries, multiple social media platforms, PR, traveler kit giveaways (250) – MDA
- State Fair Kick-Off/Press Event with trivia challenge, hosted by MN Department of Agriculture

## 2021 The Minnesota Great River Road: An All-American Adventure

- Celebrated new MN GRR All-American Road designation
- MN-MRPC paid partnership with River Travel Magazine (one of four seasons promoted in year-long article series)

## 2020 Take the Great River Road to Minnesota's Scenic Outdoor Tapestry

- During Covid when many attractions had limited offerings or were closed, featured eight unique "scenic reaches" of the MN GRR, which were included in the application for All-American road status.
- MN-MRPC paid print and digital package with Minnesota Monthly "12 Weeks of Autumn" promotion. Print ad, online article, e-newsletter sponsorships, and digital ads.

## 2019 Follow the Great River Road to Some of Minnesota's Greatest Parks

- Featured state parks and national park along the MN GRR. Digital travel guide developed and hosted by MnDOT -  
<https://mndot.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=bfeb1e99fe634e23ba0e8f8d949ef028>

## 2018 Minnesota Great River Road Marks 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with Improvements to Enhance the Public's Mississippi River Experience

- Launch of Plan Your Trip Online Interactive Map and announcement of new Wayfinding Signage (MnDOT led and staffed projects)

## 2017 Drive the Great River Road to Find Minnesota's Sense of Place

- Authentic Minnesota experiences - discover more of what it means to be a Minnesotan and see first-hand how the history and development along the river has shaped who we are.
- Bemidji
- Grand Rapids – Forestry
- Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe – Wild Rice
- Oliver Kelley Farm
- Port of St. Paul
- Winona/Minnesota Marine Art Museum

## 2016 Fall Road Trip Minnesota: 10 "Glimpses of America" via the Great River Road

- 10 Minnesota places where you can glimpse America through important stories of our country and state.
- Federal Dam
- Forest History Center
- Savanna Portage State Park
- Charles Lindbergh House & Museum
- National Eagle Center
- Mill City Museum
- Weisman Art Museum
- Historic Fort Snelling
- Mississippi National River & Recreation Area
- Great Dakota Gathering



## Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission

56 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue South, #283 • St. Cloud, Minnesota 56301

651-341-4196 • info@MnMississippiRiver.com

**Members of the House:** Sydney Jordan (60A); Leigh Finke (66A) **Members of the Senate:** Karin Housley (33); John Hoffman (34) **State Agency Appointees:** Paul Hugunin – Agriculture, Marni Karnowski – Transportation, Lisa Havelka – Explore Minnesota Tourism, Grant Wilson – Natural Resources, David Kelliher – Historical Society **Regional Appointees:** Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids, Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd, Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River, John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings, Kate Carlson – Hastings to Iowa Border **Member at Large:** Anne Lewis

November 21, 2023

Jim Sullivan  
Minnesota Department of Commerce  
85 7th Place East, Suite 280  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
jim.sullivan@state.mn.us

RE: Northland Reliability Project, Docket Numbers 22-415 and 22-416

Dear Mr. Sullivan,

The Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC) has authorized the comments below regarding the Northland Reliability Project's current proposed route. Our comments focus on the mission of the MN-MRPC and National Scenic Byway Intrinsic Qualities as defined by the Federal Highway Administration.

As established under Minnesota Statute 161.1419, the MN-MRPC's mission is to promote, preserve and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road, which holds All-American Road status under the Federal Highway Administration's National Scenic Byways Program. The Great River Road has achieved this esteemed designation because it possesses characteristics of national significance demonstrating intrinsic qualities in at least two of the following areas – archaeological; cultural; historic; natural; recreational; and scenic. We are charged with protecting the byway, its intrinsic qualities, and the river it celebrates for current and future byway travelers and residents.

The Northland Reliability Project proposed route has potential impacts to the Minnesota Great River Road, which is part of an All-American Road and National Scenic Byway in ten states. Our initial review indicates that the proposed 345 kV power line route will alter intrinsic qualities of the Great River Road. We ask that decision makers and project applicants utilize all possible strategies to avoid, minimize and mitigate any impact to the Great River Road and Mississippi River corridors; and exercise due diligence in assessing potential impacts to the Great River Road.

Specifically, the MN-MRPC requests additional information and provides initial mitigation recommendations as follows.

#### Additional Information

- A video/photo visual impact simulation of the proposed lines (including structure options that may minimize visual impacts), and associated vegetation impact where the proposed route crosses the Great River Road or is within seven miles of the byway.
- Add figures the size of a person or vehicle for scale comparison to graphic showing 115 kV, 230 kV and proposed 345 kV towers.
- Information on how structures will be maintain including addressing potential degradation of ground area surrounding poles.

Mitigation

- Less visible options such as underground lines in the areas crossing the Great River Road.
- Minimization of tree and vegetation removal.
- Restoration of disturbed areas with native/shrubby vegetation.
- Poles set back as far away from the road as practical.

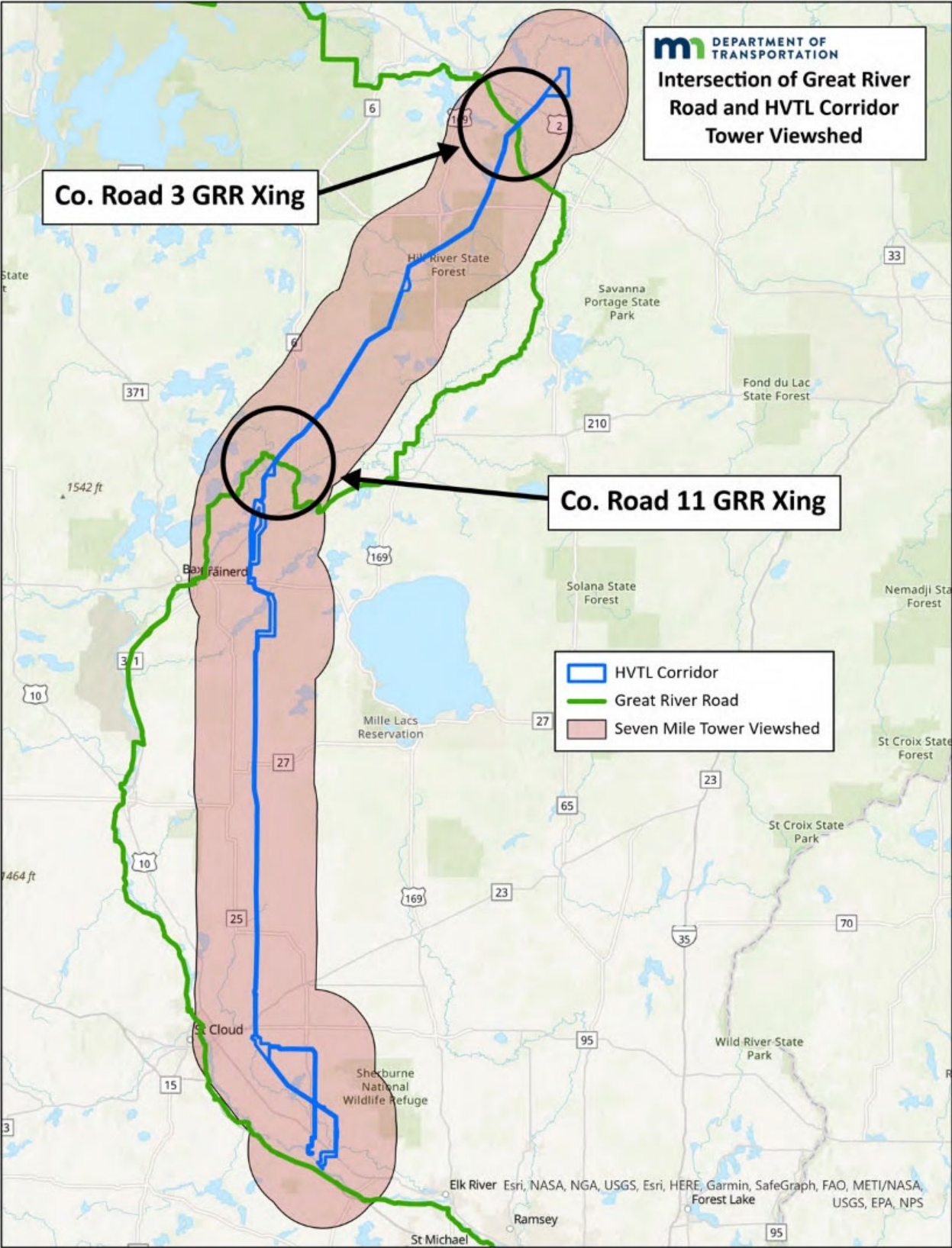
A map is attached showing the proposed crossings of the Great River Road and a seven mile viewshed.

We appreciate your consideration and offer our commissioners and technical advisors to provide further information as the process continues. Please add the MN-MRPC to your stakeholder list for communications as this project continues and keep us informed of actions taken.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Anfinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

John Anfinson, Vice Chair



### **3. Other Comments**

Various entities submitted comments during the scoping comment period raising topics and routing considerations for inclusion in the EA.<sup>23</sup>

The Crow Wing County Historical Society submitted a letter in which it commented on both the Certificate of Need and the Route Permit. In its letter, the Historical Society poses several questions regarding need for the Project. The Historical Society recommends that the Commission “require appropriate resources be allocated to evaluate and survey the area to be impacted for potential historical, cultural, and religious sites.”<sup>24</sup> The Applicants note that they continue to work closely with Tribal Nation representatives and the State Historic Preservation Office on evaluating potential impacts of the Project on cultural resources.

Kate Swanson, on behalf of a group of Hay Lake landowners, submitted a letter from Jon Mobeck, Executive Director of the National Loon Center requesting that the Commission consider re-routing the Project west of Hay Lake to protect loon habitat. In addition, the National Loon Center recommends that certain precautions be taken to mitigate impacts to trumpeter swans, such as by using bird diverters.<sup>25</sup> The Applicants note that the combination of the Riverton Area Alternative Corridor and County Road 59 Alignment Alternative provide an alternative for evaluation in the EA that addresses the concerns raised in this letter. Applicants will work cooperatively with the MnDNR to identify areas for marking the transmission lines with bird flight diverters to mitigate potential avian impacts.

Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission submitted comments regarding the Project.<sup>26</sup> The Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission requests video/photo visual impact simulations of the proposed lines and a consideration of undergrounding at the two Great River Road crossings. The Project crosses the Great River Road at County Road 3 in Itasca County and the second crossing at County Road 11 in Crow Wing County. The Applicants will work with these counties to obtain the necessary road crossing permits. Applicants object to the proposed visual simulations and analysis of undergrounding for these two crossings being included in the scope of the EA. As noted in the Applicants’ December 1, 2023 response to the scoping comments submitted by the Minnesota

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2023); Loren Kantola Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-08](#) (Nov. 7, 2023); Randy and Traci Kranz Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-10](#) (Nov. 8, 2023); Roney and Marianna Kranz Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-10](#) (Nov. 6, 2023); Don and Ardell Loehr Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-10](#) (Nov. 14, 2023); Al Pekarek Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-14](#) (undated); Cheryl Wynn Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-18](#) (Oct. 24, 2023); Steve and Tina Yaunick Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-18](#) (undated).

<sup>23</sup> NoCapX 2020 also submitted comments on completeness. See NoCapX 2020 Comments, eDocket No. [20238-198415-02](#) (Aug. 22, 2023).

<sup>24</sup> Crow Wing County Historical Society Comments, eDocket Nos. [202311-200866-08](#), [20239-198833-01](#) (Sept. 5, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> See National Loon Center Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200858-18](#) (Nov. 17, 2023).

<sup>26</sup> Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission Comments, eDocket No. [202311-200867-03](#) (Nov. 21, 2023).

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Department of Transportation (“MnDOT”), the Proposed Route uses existing transmission line crossings at the two crossings of Great River Road, thus minimizing potential impacts to the scenic byway. Applicants’ December 1, 2023 comments also explained why the requested visual simulations are not necessary for evaluation in the EA. Finally, the Applicants previously evaluated undergrounding as an alternative in the Application at Section 4.9.

**Conclusion**

Minnesota Power and Great River Energy appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments in response to alternative routes and other recommendations proposed by members of the public and other stakeholders. Should additional scoping comments be received after these response comments are submitted, the Applicants respectfully reserve the right to supplement these comments and respond to any suggested alternatives, as allowed under Minn. R. 7850.3700, subp. 2.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jim Atkinson  
Jim Atkinson  
Minnesota Power  
Manager - Environmental and Real Estate

/s/ Dan Lesher  
Dan Lesher  
Great River Energy  
Manager, Transmission Permitting and Land Rights

cc: Service Lists



**Dairyland Power Cooperative  
Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
Wabasha County Relocation Project Introduction Meeting  
December 8, 2023**

**Participants:** John Afinson (Mississippi River Parkway Commission), Marni Karnowski (Mississippi River Parkway Commission / MnDOT), Chris Miller (Mississippi River Parkway Commission), Sage Williams (Dairyland), Travis Oates (S&L), Andy Zorn (S&L), Britta Bergland (Merjent), Kristin Lenz (Merjent)

Lenz provided a brief intro for the Project. The Project is a relocation of Dairyland Power Cooperatives' (Dairyland's) existing 161-kV transmission line that is currently located on the CapX structures that runs roughly from the Town of Plainville northeast toward the City of Kellogg and the Mississippi River. Xcel Energy and CapX owners are moving forward with the 2<sup>nd</sup> circuit on the CapX structures, which necessitates that Dairyland vacate the 161-kV line. Dairyland has reviewed other potential route alternatives through the area. There is a quite a bit of state-managed and federally-managed lands to the east along the Mississippi River; based on Dairyland's initial review of potential routes, the proposed route along Highway 42 appears to be the most environmentally preferable because of the avoidance of these areas and the ability to be near a road right-of-way. Lenz clarified that although the 161-kV line will be removed, the CapX structures will stay; the 161-kV will be replaced by the 2<sup>nd</sup> 345-kV line by the CapX owners as a separate project.

Lenz shared the Project alignment crossing of the State Highway 61 scenic byway on the Project Viewer. Lenz indicated that Dairyland held open houses in early November 2023 and as a result of landowner input, some changes have been made to the alignment; however, the crossing of State Highway 61 has not changed from the Project Fact Sheet provided to the Mississippi River Parkway Commission (Commission). Considerations of the crossing include steep topography on the west side along State Highway 42 – Dairyland is currently planning to traverse the valley through this area. On the east side of State Highway 61, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has purchased several properties – Dairyland is in communication with the USACE. Dairyland has also reached out to Wabasha County, who has informed Dairyland that in the next 10 years, there are plans to soften to curves along County Road 84. These factors were taken into consideration when designing the Proposed Route. Dairyland is currently working on developing a Certificate of Need and Route Permit application to submit to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) around mid-March 2023.

Afinson indicated that based on the aeriels, it appeared there would be minimal tree clearing on both sides of State Highway 61 at the proposed crossing location. Afinson requested that Dairyland look to minimize the tree clearing on both sides and/or try to site the poles behind the treed areas to screen the structures as much as possible. Lenz indicated that trees below the lines will be cleared, but Dairyland can look at minimizing tree clearing as much as possible. Afinson indicated that sight lines are important to consider – a perpendicular crossing is better than paralleling the roadway because one would only see the crossing for a moment while driving down the Great River Road.

Miller indicated that other mitigation measures that the Commission recommends to protect the viewshed include:

- Minimization of tree and vegetation removal
- Setback of poles from the Great River Road to the extent possible
- Choose a color of poles that blends into the landscape

**Dairyland Power Cooperative  
Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
Wabasha County Relocation Project Introduction Meeting  
December 8, 2023**

Miller and Karnowski requested that Dairyland provide visual simulations of before and after the crossing to understand how the new infrastructure would look. Miller requested that a scale be provided to understand the magnitude of the change.

Afinson inquired on the span lengths. Spans are planned to be 400-800 feet, poles will be between 70-110 feet high and the poles are also planned to be weathered steel (brown).

Lenz indicated that during Dairyland's meeting with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), they also requested a visual simulation of the crossing, which Dairyland is planning on developing. This may also be included in the Route Permit application.

Kate Carlson is another Commissioner and local contact for the Commission that was unable to attend today; however, the other Commissioners will provide her an update on the meeting.

Karnowski inquired on the success of the open houses; Lenz and Williams responded that it was well attended, with about 60 participants. No significant environmental resource concerns were identified. Some participants expressed concerns related to electric magnetic fields and stray voltage.

The Commissioners were very appreciative of the early coordination and will reach out if anything else comes up.

## **Bowstring Lake US-MN-5118 Project**

Proposed construction of a 195' (199' including all appurtenances)' monopole telecommunication tower within a 100' by 100' lease area. A proposed 30' by ~330' access/utility easement will extend along the south side of the proposed lease area, and then south connecting with County Road 118. (Near Ball Club Lake)

### **Summary of Communications**

MN-MRPC email as directed at 11/16/23 MN-MRPC meeting (John Anfinson, Megan Christianson and Sally Fineday were copied and involved in reviews): Commission members understand the need for a telecommunications tower in this area but are concerned about the significant visual impact from the Great River Road and Mississippi River itself. They are recommending use of a tower camouflage treatment to help address this impact and preserve the intrinsic qualities of the Great River Road as All-American Road/National Scenic Byway. Included photo example.

Main points of responses:

- There are already high-tension lines in the area – and those lines go OVER the river.
- The client will not voluntarily shift to a monopine A 195' monopine will increase costs significantly.
- Questioned whether a 195' monopine would be aesthetically preferable to a monopole. In some cases, such tall monopines can look very out of place given the unnatural height.
- This project falls under the jurisdiction of the tribe who have completed an evaluation of it and approved it as proposed.
- Additionally, there is an existing tower that is closer to the byway and does not appear to be camouflaged.

MN-MRPC: We appreciate the additional information provided including details on existing structures and understand the need for the tower and current constraints. At the same time, the Commission does continue to monitor impact to the intrinsic qualities of the byway including cumulative impact resulting from multiple projects along the byway and in that spirit requests early notification and review opportunities on any future projects in the Minnesota Great River Road corridor. For now, it would be helpful to know the cost of the monopine vs. monopole, your review of settings where it would be appropriate, and suggestions on other types of visual impact mitigation that have been utilized or are being developed. This will assist the Commission with future reviews, recommendations, and work with partners along the full length of the Minnesota Great River Road. Thank you for letting us know that this project falls under the jurisdiction of the tribe who have completed an evaluation of it and approved it as proposed. We are glad that the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has been involved in the conversations. (Sally Fineday requested documentation showing the approval of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, which was provided.)

Details provided in response regarding options considered:

- The cheapest option is a lattice tower which would be about \$50,000 - \$60,000 (~\$350-\$360,000 including construction and normal maintenance). This option would have the worst aesthetics due to the nature of the lattice design itself.
- The monopole option was a voluntary decision and costs about \$100,000 (~\$400-\$450,000 including construction and normal maintenance). It could be painted, but galvanized steel was chosen as it is preferable from a maintenance perspective but also from an aesthetics perspective.
- The monopine would cost about \$300,000 plus costs for the rest of the compound materials and significant labor costs. This site could cost in excess of \$750-800,000 dollars should a monopine be required [there are added costs for maintaining a monopine designed tower as well as the additional costs for installation], which could make the project less likely to move forward due to the cost/benefit of bringing coverage to the area.

MN-MRPC: As noted previously the MN Mississippi River Parkway Commission understands the need for and importance of the tower, current constraints including costs, and that the project will proceed as proposed. This additional information was requested to provide context for future projects that the Commission may review. It's helpful to know in more detail what would be involved for such modifications to take place and the range of options that were considered.

Response:

- Client plans to proceed with project.
- Lotis Environmental offered future discussion on what has been observed in their experiences for tower design (minimization and mitigation).

## **City of Brainerd - TH 210/Lum Park Pedestrian Bridge Project**

Construction funding for the TH 210/Lum Park Pedestrian Bridge over Highway 210 in Brainerd.

The project will construct a bridge across TH 210 adjacent to Lum Park connecting the Mississippi River to a new trail from MnDOT's TH 25 Bridge project, providing a safer facility for non-motorized travelers.

Estimated total project cost: \$5,110,000

Transportation Alternatives request: \$800,000

MN-MRPC letter of support approved 11-16-23. Requesting additional letter for LCCMR request and/or a general letter of support.

LCCMR request: \$3,750,000

Other funding requests: Active Transportation (AT) Grant, MN Bonding Bill (not recommended by Gov. Walz), MnDNR

Local match: Depends on the amount of grant and MnDNR funding received. If only LCCMR, would be about \$1,250,000 + non-construction costs (engineering, right-of-way, etc.)