



March 26, 2018

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
House Transportation &
Infrastructure Committee
2165 RHOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Democrat
House Transportation &
Infrastructure Committee
2164 RHOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster and Ranking Democrat DeFazio,

We are writing to express our opposition to amendment number 75 (in the bill's rule), offered by Rep. Jason Lewis of Minnesota, to HR 4, the *Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2018*. This amendment is targeted at a single, federally-designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) in Minnesota – The Metropolitan Council.

The Metropolitan Council is the regional policy-making body, planning agency, and provider of essential services for the Twin Cities metropolitan region, including transportation planning. The 17-member Metropolitan Council is a policy-making board, which has guided the strategic growth of the metro area for nearly 50 years. Elected officials and citizens share their expertise with the Metropolitan Council by serving on key advisory committees. The council was established in 1967 and served as a model for Congress in the creation of the MPO process under federal law. The 17 members of the council, which has a broader mandate than just transportation, are appointed by the Governor, regardless of the party in power.

A key participant in the transportation planning process is the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB). The TAB helps shape regional and state transportation plans. Every year it adopts the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which identifies which regional projects will receive federal funds. The TAB consists of 34 members drawn from county and city elected officials, citizens, transportation providers, and representatives of state and regional agencies. The transportation planning process ensures that various points of view are considered when establishing transportation policy and allocating transportation funds. The TAB provides a forum for deliberation among state, regional, and local officials, transportation providers, and private citizens; reviews and comments on the Transportation Policy Plan and other significant planning documents produced by the Metropolitan Council; reviews and comments on transportation documents related to regional transportation policy prepared by the Minnesota Department of Transportation; and solicits and evaluates applications for federal transportation funding, and conducts public hearings and adoption of the region's TIP.

The TAB develops the transportation project list and submits it to the Council for an up-or-down vote on the entire list – there is no authority for the Council to line-item any project off the list. Further, each TAB member is allotted one vote, regardless of the size, of a board member's district.

This amendment, if passed into law, will force a re-designation of the MPO against the wishes of the Metropolitan Council itself. This would raise concerns regarding federally apportioned funds and grant funding and potentially impact associated projects. USDOT may withhold funding until a new MPO is designated and develops and approves a transportation plan and TIP. USDOT also must certify the

new MPO meets all the requirements under 23USC, Section 134 – metropolitan transportation planning. This could take several years to accomplish. Under a worst-case scenario, projects in the metropolitan area would be shelved in the meantime and associated jobs would be lost.

Under current law, the Twin Cities region may opt to change its MPO designation and structure, but there is lack of consensus on what a new MPO structure should be. This amendment would force the re-designation process but not resolve the differences of opinion on MPO structure that exist in the region, resulting in what will likely be a long, hard-to-resolve process.

Finally, the amendment may not have the intended results. The establishment of a new MPO may give a larger voice to the largest city based on population, not the one vote, one district of the current Metropolitan Council. We strongly believe that this issue should be more carefully reviewed and receive the proper oversight of the committee during the reauthorization process of the FAST Act - not in an amendment to an unrelated bill. At the end of 2015, USDOT attempted to rewrite the MPO process through a rule-making which Congress overwhelmingly rejected because it wanted the opportunity to review and make appropriate adjustments when it considers surface transportation legislation. We believe that same level of oversight must be afforded in this matter.

We respectfully request that you oppose this amendment and not risk jobs and infrastructure investments in this large metropolitan area.

Sincerely,



DeLania Hardy
Executive Director
Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations



Erich Zimmermann
Deputy Executive Director
National Association of Regional Councils