



# Summary of Meeting with Elwyn Tinklenberg

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

*Friday, May 9, 2008*

**Guest speaker: Elwyn Tinklenberg**, former Minnesota Commissioner of Transportation

**Present:** Verne Johnson, chair; Chuck Clay, Bill Frenzel (by phone), Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, John Mooty, and Wayne Popham (by phone)

**A. Context of the meeting** -The Civic Caucus has been reviewing the role of various governmental jurisdictions in priority-setting for highway and transit projects in Minnesota. A few weeks ago Congressman Jim Oberstar urged the Civic Caucus to visit with Elwyn Tinklenberg, former Minnesota Commissioner of Transportation because, according to Oberstar, Tinklenberg had developed some new approaches for coordinating roles of different agencies and levels of government.

**B. Welcome and introduction** -Verne and Paul welcomed and introduced **Elwyn Tinklenberg**, who served as Governor Jesse Ventura's commissioner of transportation from 1991 to 2002. Originally a Methodist minister in Blaine (1977 to 1986), Tinklenberg served four years on the Blaine City Council and as mayor of Blaine from 1987 to 1996. He is president of a transportation, government and business consulting firm. He served on the board of directors for the American Public Transportation Association in 2003. He is a candidate for Congress from Minnesota's sixth district.

**C. Comments and discussion** -During Tinklenberg's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were raised:

**1. New changes in transportation policy** - Some fundamental shifts in transportation policy are emerging, Tinklenberg said, and it is very important for us to look back at where we have been. He hearkened back to passage of the Interstate highway system in the 1950s, and its long term impact on development.

We're seeing some fundamental shifts today, in terms of housing, and in terms of different mobility options, and in terms of different environmental footprints. As an example, he cited the Bloomington Central Station area east of the Mall of America, between 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. The Hiawatha light rail line goes through the middle of this area. The development is being touted by its developer, the McGough Companies, as Minnesota's first mixed-use "urban village" on a light rail line, with a combination of office, residential, hotel, and park development.

Such urban village development can occur along bus rapid transit routes, too, he said, citing the popularity of park-and-ride ramps by bus stations.

As evidence that traditional forms of development appear less popular, Tinklenberg noted the increasing numbers of foreclosures in Wright County subdivisions.

**2. Coordinating all the actors in transportation** -Asked how all the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal actors can be coordinated, Tinklenberg replied that MnDOT needs to continue the kind of leadership that he said was begun during the years he served as commissioner. Previous to his tenure, he said, MnDOT functioned on a project-by-project basis. He felt MnDOT needed to get into inter-regional coordination, with unified strategies for key rural-to-urban corridors that involved many different transportation jurisdictions.

A Civic Caucus member observed that what Tinklenberg is discussing would seem to call for more statewide leadership centered in the office of Governor. Tinklenberg replied that as transportation commissioner he knew he would receive support from then-Governor Ventura.

**3. Improving the particularly difficult coordination problems in the metro area** -Tinklenberg said the metro area is characterized by overlapping and competing systems that are difficult to coordinate in a strategic plan. Moreover, antagonisms have been present among participants. A new role for metro counties, with greater financing and policy roles in rail transit, is presenting difficulties for coordination with the Metropolitan Council, he acknowledged.

**4. Explore ways to strengthen the Metropolitan Council** -A regional approach is necessary, he said, which means strengthening the role of the Metropolitan Council. Possibly the Council should be elected or maybe counties could play a role in selection of its members. A regional structure is needed, he said, because county boundaries don't fit the urbanized area. He also cited the importance of the metropolitan fiscal disparities law providing for sharing of tax base among units of government in the metro area. A Civic Caucus member noted that counties are administrative arms of the state, and don't have home rule powers. An effort to give counties responsibility for metropolitan solid waste control in the years following creation of the Metropolitan Council didn't succeed, the member said.

**5. Expansion of light rail transit in the metro area** -Tinklenberg said the Twin Cities area should break from models of the past and look to the future with LRT. A hub-and-spoke LRT system, not only a "spine" connecting the two downtowns, is needed, he said.

**6. Policy and revenue needs for the state and the metro area** -Tinklenberg would maintain a strong state role for transportation, including, for example, connecting parts of rural Minnesota that are vital to the entire state's economy with the metro area. But there are important transportation developments that affect only the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and a good revenue source within the metro area itself is needed to pay for such developments, rather than using statewide revenue sources.

Thus, Tinklenberg thinks the current constitutional dedication of gasoline tax and vehicle license fees is sound statewide policy. He thinks the new metro area county-based sales tax for rail transit as a step in the right direction for financing transportation needs unique to the metro area.

**7. Experience in other states** -Tinklenberg cited a multi-functional, public-private initiative in Utah, known as Envision Utah, <http://www.envisionutah.org> , as an example of the kind of coordinated strategy he would like to see in Minnesota.

**8. Central corridor LRT urgently needed for development purposes** -Tinklenberg said the Central corridor LRT line will have major impact on reshaping the corridor, for residential and business.

The Central corridor LRT, with many stops, isn't intended to have the speed that characterizes commuter rail, such as the North Star line from Big Lake to Minneapolis, he said.

**9. Responses to the federal "carrot"?**- Tinklenberg, as an aspirant to serve in Congress, was asked whether many transportation initiatives aren't just a response to the "carrot" of available federal money. He said he does support federal earmarks as long as they are developed in an open and transparent process and are consistent with—and serving to implement—plans that are initiated and approved at the local, regional or state levels. He cited a metropolitan plan for the St. Cloud area as an example of a plan that he would not hesitate to help support from Washington, D. C. He praised efforts of Martin Sabo, on behalf of the Hiawatha LRT line, and Jim Oberstar, on behalf of the North Star commuter rail line.

**10. More private involvement in transportation** -He likes the idea of private interests helping to pay the cost of LRT stations. He wouldn't support selling toll roads to the private sector.

**11. Thanks** -On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Tinklenberg for meeting with us today.