



JOURNAL

A Public Policy Monthly from the Citizens League



I-394's MnPASS lane: lessons learned

by John Doan, P.E. and Lee W. Munnich, Jr.

When it comes to managing freeway congestion, there is no silver bullet. Transit, carpooling, and more road capacity are all needed to accommodate our region's fast-growing economy.

But we do need to expand freeways in coming years, and when we do, we need to make sure these enormously expensive public assets are used as efficiently as possible.

So what does an efficient freeway look like?

First, it includes a lane that guarantees less congested conditions to high-occupancy vehicles (HOVs), such as transit and carpools. Creating an incentive for HOV use improves freeway through-put on a traveler-per-lane-mile basis.

While HOV lanes should be included on freeway expansions, until HOV lanes are used to their full advantage, they can be problematic. An HOV lane with excess capacity is inefficient and often becomes a political target. Therefore, for years traffic engineers have looked for a way to fill underused HOV lanes without clogging them to the point of congestion.

We have found the solution to that vexing problem in Minnesota and it's called MnPASS. With MnPASS, single-occupancy vehicle (SOVs) users are given the option of using the HOV lane for a price. The tolls are collected at full speed via electronic devices called transponders. The price of the lane changes continually depending on the level of traffic congestion in the lane. This "dynamic pricing" limits the number of SOVs in the lane, and prevents the lane from clogging.



With MnPASS, carpoolers and transit users continue to use the lane at no additional cost, and pricing helps to keep traffic in their lane free flowing.

MnPASS was launched on I-394 in the spring of 2005, and a spring 2006 preliminary analysis paints a fascinating early picture of this innovative new traffic management tool. As we plan future freeway expansions in the Twin Cities region, it's important to understand the lessons from last year's I-394 MnPASS experiment.

Pricing works

It would hardly come as a surprise to Adam Smith and other free-market economists, but we saw last year that supply-sensitive pricing is an effective traffic management tool.

Using the time-honored principles of supply and demand and some nifty technology, traffic engineers found they could control the number of users in the lane with a fair amount of precision. MnPASS prices are adjusted electronically as often as every three minutes.

continued on page 6

INSIDE

2

Connections

3

Viewpoint:
Democracy's
operating system is in
need of an upgrade

4

The results are in:
MAP 150 survey
finds common ground

8

Facts Unfiltered:
Instant Runoff Voting

9

What computer
games could teach us
if we let them

11

Perspectives: Twin
Cities Daily Planet
opens a new chapter
on community
journalism

CONNECTIONS

Building a League of Citizens



Kristen Nelson, Citizens League member Larry Baker and John Curry answer a question from 89.3 The Current DJ Steve Seel at our latest Policy and a Pint on the future of Minnesota's environment.

Executive committee sets priorities for 2006

At its April retreat, the Citizens League executive committee chose continued growth in membership and engagement and a renewed interest in looking creatively at public policymaking as its top priorities for the next year.

With two new staff members working on membership, the Citizens League has a new opportunity to continue membership growth and momentum. The executive committee emphasized a need to create more opportunities for members to get involved in our work—and significantly improving our use of technology to engage existing and potential members.

Through the Minnesota Anniversary Project and our ongoing study committee work, the Citizens League is uniquely positioned to explore new approaches to policymaking. This includes policy solutions that look beyond government to the role of all sectors, and policy projects that target problems that policymakers have not been able to resolve.

Missed Policy and a Pint or Bridging the Partisan Divide?

Don't worry—you can listen to both online.

Just go to www.citizensleague.net/weblog for the links.

In Your Words

Be realistic about the tenure of Superintendents

New superintendents are commonly welcomed as saviors. But a person starting a superintendent career in Saint Paul can be expected to want to move on before too long—as Pat Harvey wanted to do (Seattle, Denver) and as Curman Gaines did before her (Seattle). So the community should be realistic about the likelihood that its new superintendent will be here long and therefore realistic about how much even a capable person can accomplish under even the best of circumstances. It's a risk to bet everything on 'leadership'. — *Ted Kolderie*

List of new members, donors, and recruiters

New Members

John Arlandson
Anthony Arrigo
Sharon Sayles Belton
Donna Zimmerman and Phil Ditmanson
Kathleen Doran-Norton
Mary Ford
Angie and Russ Freeman
Thomas Harnisch
Barb Hemberger
Nancy Homans and Gary Hesser
Dean A. Honetschlager
John Hoshal
Rep. Thomas Huntley
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Bryan F. Lindsley
Patricia S. and Daniel J. McInerney, Jr.
Robert Minton
Nick Swenson
Rep. Kathy Tingelstad
Robert Vanasek

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Cold Spring Granite Company
Coldwell Banker Burnett
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Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties
Crown Holdings Inc.
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Hubbard Broadcasting Inc.
Insignia Systems Inc.
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Lifeworks Services
Lindquist & Vennum
LogIn, Inc.
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Minitex Library, Information Network
Minneapolis Community and Technical College
Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce
Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Minnesota Private College Council
MSP Communications
North Central Mineral Ventures
Park Nicollet Health Services
Peterson Engberg & Peterson
Property Resources Corporation
Roger Meyer Consulting
Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
Sherburne & Wadleigh Ltd
South Country Health Alliance
Scott County Administration
St. Paul Linoleum & Carpet Co.
Standard Heating and Air Conditioning
Steppingstone Consulting, Inc.
Tapemark Company
Washington County Administration

Recruiters

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Sean Kershaw
Dee Long
Nancy Longley
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Thank you to our volunteer

Cal Clark



Democracy in America — and at the Citizens League

To keep our national conversation alive, we need to rethink how we practice democracy

by Sean Kershaw

The Citizens League recently endorsed democracy and good governance in our core set of principles. What could be easier? We've been a model for 54 years of how the practice of both can solve policy problems creatively and effectively.

But while the idea of democracy is not in question and shouldn't be, I believe we should all be questioning how effectively democracy is working in our daily lives. If our nation is sending a generation abroad to fight for democracy, then we owe it to them to have a better sense of how we practice it here at home—to reinvent democracy for a new generation in a Minnesota that is changing rapidly.

Our traditional notions of democracy show signs of strain these days. We see the evidence in the decline in voter and traditional civic participation; in our lack of trust in our current governing processes; in our consumer worldview that expects limitless choices and freedom, but rejects personal responsibility for the consequences of those choices; in our growing racial and income gaps; and in our declining literacy about policy issues.

We're at a transition point. Our old models of democratic practice are faltering. They either won't solve the problems we care about (the legislature and Congress); or they're too simplistic (democracy as voting and government); or they are overrun by special interests that make their living perpetuating anger and division at the expense of common good and common sense solutions.

But this moment also offers great opportunity. Complaining that citizens don't care about democracy, or that we're forever constrained to “bowling alone,” is a little like complaining that computers are fundamentally in trouble because my old Commodore 64 can't keep up. The problem is simply that our ways of practicing democracy haven't caught up with the world we live in now. We need to upgrade our democratic “operating system.” And that means going back to its fundamental principles and purpose.

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Democracy means...

Democracy literally means “rule by the people.” It is a system of governance based on a set of ideals that are fundamentally in tension with each other: for example, the tension between conscience (the Declaration of Independence) and law (the Constitution); or the tension between liberty (the Declaration), and equality (the Bill of Rights). The debate about these issues is with us still.

Democracy invites “we the people” to step into this debate—to govern—and to create effective institutions, practices, and policy solutions in the process. After the debate that produced our republican form of government, Ben Franklin implored us to keep it—if we could. We must. And Thomas Jefferson said democracy should be fundamentally renewed every 20 years. We're due.

Democracy does...

Keeping this republic means asking ourselves where and how we practice democracy. At the Citizens League, we believe that all citizens have the capacity to govern and solve problems, and that capacity should be imbedded in every institution, not delegated to government alone. We need new opportunities to practice democracy and to build the skills needed to have a vigorous debate, to keep our national conversation alive.

That is one of the driving forces behind our study committees: the need to create “common ground”—places where people from a variety of ideological and specific interests and perspectives can come together to

analyze facts and issues and to argue about them in light of a common set of ideals and the long-term interests of Minnesota.

Our challenge at the Citizens League is to preserve and enhance this study committee process, and to use technology and new opportunities like on-site employer-based engagement to bring more people to the discussion in the hope of solving new problems. The Minnesota Anniversary Project is essential to this effort.

I'm convinced that workplaces will become the new laboratories for democracy and democratic leadership. And I hope non-profits make a stronger commitment to real non-partisanship and democratic capacity building.

We'll also need new models that close the gap between citizens and policy making. The direct democracy of initiative and referendum is not what I think our founding fathers had in mind. But we need to reestablish citizens and families as the basis for policy in matters like health care, education, and the creation of healthy communities. Our recent medical facilities study offers one such example, proposing the creation of a new citizen and buyer-driven Medical Information Authority.

And we'll need a common set of principles and facts. This is why we're spending this time on our new principles. We also plan to continue our “Facts Unfiltered” section of the *Minnesota Journal*, and expand it through technology to the discussion at our Mind Opener and Policy and a Pint events.

Democracy rediscovered

This is the beauty of democracy. It provides not only the best means we know of for citizens to govern and solve problems, but it is intrinsically able to reinvent and renew itself when these means don't work as they should. We owe it to Franklin and Jefferson, to our current service members abroad, and to future generations in Minnesota to do no less. ●

Sean Kershaw is the Executive Director of the Citizens League. He can be reached at skershaw@citizensleague.net or 651-293-0575x14.



Setting priorities for Minnesota's future

MAP 150 survey finds common ground among Minnesotans

Erin Sapp

The Citizens League believes, and always has believed, that citizens will act to promote the common good given the opportunity. The Minnesota Anniversary Project, MAP 150, is about citizen involvement in creating an agenda for Minnesota's next 150 years that reflects this common good.

Looking ahead, we know that Minnesota will undergo some major demographic changes by 2020. These changes will transform Minnesota, and we need citizens and institutions to work together to ensure our public policies reflect the priorities and values of all who call Minnesota home.

Minnesota State Demographer Tom Gillaspay projects three main demographic changes that will impact Minnesota by the year 2020:

- Minnesota's population will grow by more than 1 million people, but some rural areas will lose population.
- For the first time, people age 65 and older will outnumber school-aged children.
- Eighty percent of Minnesota's population growth after the year 2020 will come from communities of color, increasing the state's nonwhite population by almost 40 percent.

How will these changes affect Minnesota and how will they transform our policy priorities? MAP 150 put these questions and others to Citizens League members, Humphrey Institute fellows, and members of the Minnesota Newspaper Association. In all, we received more than 225 responses—the great majority from Citizens League members. Here's what we found out.

First, we asked what trends will affect Minnesota in the coming years. While we received a wide range of thoughtful responses, a few themes emerged.

- **Increasing disparities:** Respondents see a growing disparity between the haves and the have nots. They attribute the growing gap to an increased concentration on what is best for the individual instead of the larger community and to growing selfishness. Many respondents see this income gap as most prevalent in communities of color, which exacerbates racism.
- **Immigration:** The growing number of immigrants settling in Minnesota impacts

Table 1: Top Priorities for Minnesota's Future

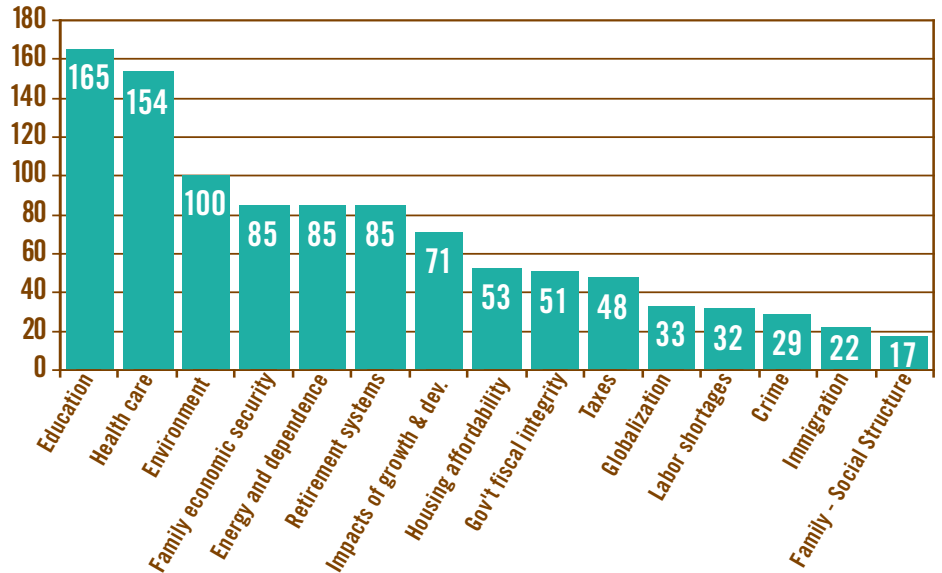
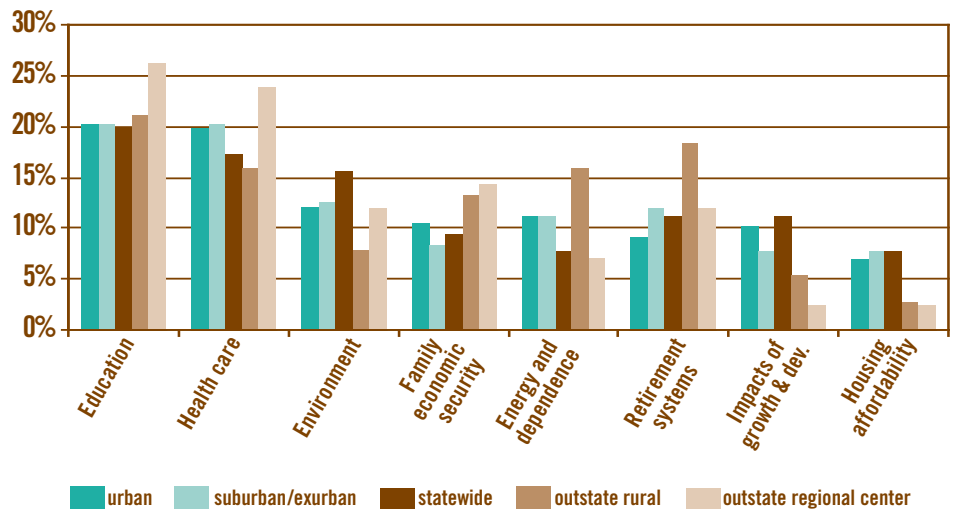


Table 2: Geographic Differences in Priorities



The geographic categories do not represent where respondents lived, but rather the focus of their work or livelihood.

- many areas of life and culture. Specifically, respondents say schools face huge challenges, particularly with regard to language.
- **Transportation/traffic:** Respondents say traffic congestion is quickly becoming a huge problem, particularly in the urban area. The respondents like light rail and want to see it expanded throughout the metro area and northern corridor.

- **Labor market shortages:** As baby boomers retire, respondents fear there won't be enough workers, or enough workers with the right skills, to fill all the available jobs. There is a growing concern that this will lead to a substantial decrease in the competitiveness of Minnesota's economy.

continued on page 5

Map 150 survey

continued from page 4

- **Healthcare:** With healthcare costs skyrocketing, respondents expressed concern about the ability of families and businesses to pay for healthcare coverage, and for baby boomers to effectively plan for retirement. Demand for healthcare services will also increase dramatically as baby boomers age, likely causing a heightened reliance on foreign health-care workers like doctors and nurses.
- **Education:** As the number of school-aged children declines, many school districts will experience shrinking resources. An increasingly diverse student population—the result of immigration—also presents schools with a growing challenge in providing all students with a uniform educational experience, particularly in the face of language barriers.
- **Social contract/civic culture/engagement deteriorating:** Respondents see the social contract and the civic culture of Minnesota deteriorating. Voter turn out is low and members feel decreasing support for community and collective causes. Many respondents feel that while this trend is increasingly prevalent in all age groups, it is particularly striking in younger generations, and that overall there is a lack of collective understanding of what it means to be a “citizen.”
- **Environment/sprawl:** As the population increases and urbanites seek “unspoiled” northern spaces, Minnesota's landscape is changing. Sprawl, coupled with rising consumption, has led to greater pollution and diminished air and water quality.

Respondents were then asked to prioritize their top five concerns from a provided list. Respondents ranked education, health care, environment, family economic security, energy and dependence on petroleum, and retirement systems among their most pressing concerns. (See Table 1)

Interestingly, across subcategories like age and sex, priorities differed little if at all. In fact, the only discernable differences in priorities were in geography. We asked respondents not where they lived, but where their work or livelihood was focused. Respondents could choose “urban,” “suburban/exurban,” “statewide,” “outstate rural,” or “outstate regional center.” As Table 2 shows,

respondents whose work focused on Greater Minnesota ranked healthcare and education as even more pressing issues than their urban counterparts, and the environment as less important. Even given these variations, however, the overall top eight issues did not

change. It is clear that Minnesotans have a clear set of priorities for their future.

Perhaps the most important thing to recognize, however, is that these issues and priorities don't exist in silos. Respondents provided extremely thoughtful commentary about how they don't have any one single priority, rather they are concerned about some specific trends that connect to a whole host of issues. For instance, many who listed education as their top priority drew connections to local and state economic competitiveness and family economic security, specifically the ability to support one's family. Respondents made it very clear that these issues are inextricably linked. Indeed, while a listing of priorities may be a good starting point, respondents voiced and demonstrated the importance of approaching issues and policy from a holistic perspective.

MAP 150 is already using these responses to set the stage for a statewide conversation about our future. Stay tuned to the MAP 150 page on the Citizens League website for more specific information. ●

Erin Sapp is a member of the Citizens League and a consultant to the MAP150 project.

The MAP 150 website is online at www.citizensleague.net/what/projects/map150

Respondents don't have any one single priority, rather they are concerned about some specific trends that connect to a whole host of issues.

In their own words

MAP 150 asked Citizens League members and others about their top issues and priorities for Minnesota's future. Here are some of their comments:

Education

“The more variations in students, the more students have unexpected needs, the more the system needs to adjust. The more the system needs to adjust, the more painful and expensive education becomes. Yet we have no choice but to figure it all out. There are never easy answers. The questions only become more challenging and we have no choice but to answer them.”

Health care

“As a Gen X'er, it is clear that the current healthcare system cannot continue to support the population and will become much worse with the post-retirement demands of the baby boomers. I do not believe that the boomer generation has the will to proactively implement the necessary changes during the time they serve in the leadership of this state's institutions and deeply fear the impact on my generation when the situation is pushed to a crisis.”

Family economic security

“Stark economic disparity only and always leads to social/political instability. And it's bad for kids. We as a society seem to care less for poor people and those who need help than we used to.”

Energy and dependence on petroleum

“Energy will largely be generated and routed through the depopulating areas of the state to feed the energy sucking flat screens of the urban areas. (My plasma set upped my energy bill noticeably to my surprise.) Hummers, trucks and SUVs absolutely suck up gas and spew it out. Ignoring the foreign policy effects, ignoring health effects, and ignoring environmental impacts, one can't help but wonder how our kids will view our wanton consumption...”

Impacts of physical growth

“Minnesotans will have to rethink how we use land. We can no longer be the 2.5 acre white picket fence state with the grocery store a five-mile drive away.”

Willingness to pay taxes

“Money isn't everything, but it's damn important. If we succumb to the siren calls of “no new taxes” we will sink into mediocrity and become just like all the other mediocre states. The best people will move out to places like Oregon and Washington, where the political leaders can see with a long-term vision of what's best for the future.”

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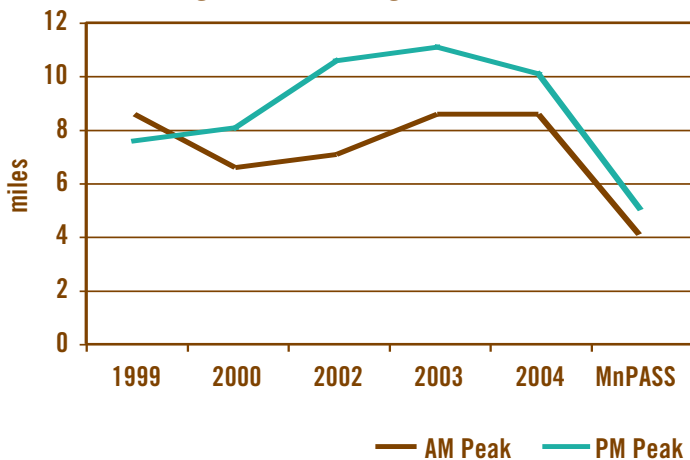


When the lane fills, prices are increased until usage decreases to the optimal level. When the lane empties, prices are decreased until usage increases to the optimal level.

The MnPASS pricing system is getting more cars through the I-394 corridor during rush hour. In the reversible section of I-394, an average of 350 additional vehicles per day use the MnPASS lane during the morning peak hour, from 7:15 to 8:15 a.m. An average of 315 additional vehicles per day use the MnPASS lane during the evening peak hour, from 5 to 6 p.m.

However, despite this higher rush hour through-put, pricing has ensured that service is maintained for carpoolers and transit users. Average speeds of 50 mph are maintained 95 percent of the time. Survey results indicate that 85 percent of MnPASS lane users are satisfied with the speed of the traffic flow in the MnPASS lane. When travelers on I-394 in the western suburbs and I-35W in the southern suburbs were surveyed about perceived congestion, there was a 10 percent reduction of those feeling delayed by congestion in the I-394 panel and no change reported by I-35W commuters (see Figure 2).

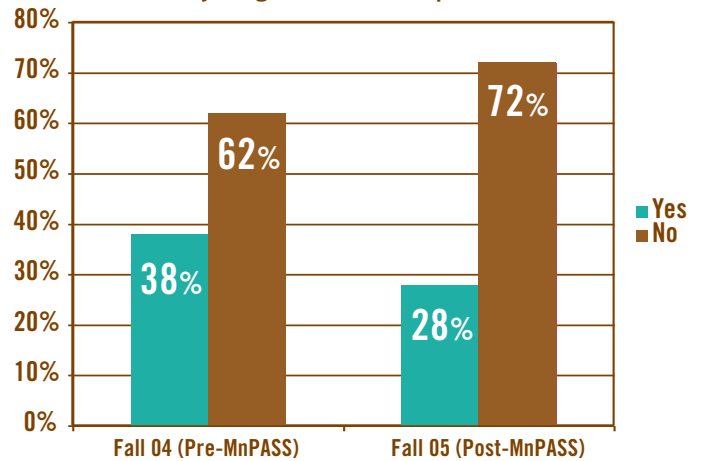
Figure 1: Mile of Congestion on I-394



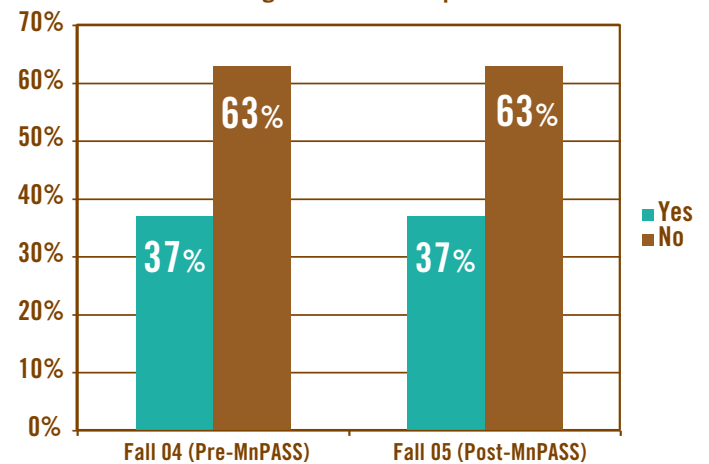
By another metric—the number of miles of congestion on I-394—early evidence for the reduction in congestion is dramatic (See Figure 1). In 2004, there were 10 miles and 8 miles of congestion during the afternoon and morning peak period, respectively. In 2005, after the MnPASS lanes opened, the miles of congestion decreased by half to 5 and 4 miles during the afternoon and morning peak periods. Other factors, such as increasing gas prices, likely played a role but when compared to I-35W in the southern suburbs, which has a HOV facility and showed an increase in miles of congestion, MnPASS appears to be helping to manage congestion.

Figure 2:

I-394 Commuters asked “Were you delayed by congestion on this trip?”



I-35W Commuters asked “Were you delayed by congestion on this trip?”



Technology works

Another lesson learned is that the technology used in MnPASS works well, and Minnesotans quickly got comfortable with it.

You don't have to be a techno geek to use MnPASS. Customers can obtain their transponder and manage their account either online—the choice of 80 percent of customers—or via a staffed customer service center. Drivers install their transponders in their

continued on page 7

MnPASS

continued from page 6

windshields in seconds and are instantly ready to use the facility. And unlike traditional toll roads, drivers never have to stop or even slow down to pay tolls.

While Minnesotans interviewed in pre-launch research expressed concerns about the complexity and reliability of an electronic dynamic pricing system, most I-394 MnPASS users have become believers. In a recent survey of MnPASS users:

- 95 percent are satisfied with the all-electronic system;
- 93 percent are satisfied with the credit card based system of funding accounts;
- 92 percent are satisfied with the ease of installing the transponder;
- 87 percent reported no problems merging into the MnPASS lane;
- 76 percent are satisfied with the dynamic toll system.

Considering that surveys show 74 percent of us still have difficulty programming a VCR machine decades after that technology hit the marketplace, the technology used for MnPASS appears to be very user friendly.

Even enforcement, a hot button issue with any HOV lane, has improved due to technology. Thanks to a first-of-its-kind electronic monitoring system, HOV lane violation rates dropped at nearly all I-394 locations, and the violation rates for I-394 are significantly lower than those observed on I-35W. No enforcement system is universally effective or loved, but by a three-to-one margin, MnPASS users expressed satisfaction with the level of enforcement on I-394 post-MnPASS.



Broad support

The pilot project has also shown that the system benefits all citizens, not just the wealthy. This is a particularly relevant issue, since concerns about economic equity have in the past stopped toll projects from moving forward in Minnesota.

Citizens of all income levels rated their use of I-394 in the post-MnPASS era as “enjoyable.” Seventy-one percent of low-income citizens said their travel experience was enjoyable, versus 68 percent for middle-income citizens and 55 percent for high-income citizens.

The pilot project has also shown that the system benefits all citizens, not just the wealthy.

High-income Minnesotans are the most likely to be subscribers and use the MnPASS lanes, but it is important to note that citizens from all income levels use the lane. Over half (54 percent) of low-income people have used the MnPASS lane, most often as a carpooler (72 percent) or bus rider (15 percent). Again, carpoolers and bus riders do not have to pay tolls. In addition, low- and middle-income citizens who subscribe find it handy and cost-effective to occasionally access the uncongested lane when late for work, day care or an important appointment. On average, MnPASS users pay to use the lanes two to three times per week.

Finally, the survey found that I-394 users of all income levels say MnPASS is a “good idea.” Though high-income citizens were most likely to come to that conclusion, low-income citizens approve of the project by a nearly overwhelming three-to-one margin. The group most likely to oppose MnPASS because it “only benefits the rich” was, interestingly, high-income citizens.

No HOV flight

Before MnPASS, many wondered whether carpooling and transit use might drop because of MnPASS. Here the data is preliminary and inconclusive, but encouraging.

It is safe to say that MnPASS doesn't seem to have hurt carpooling or transit. There are preliminary indications that carpooling and transit may have actually increased a bit since MnPASS began, which would be consistent with what happened on a similar system on I-15 in southern California. One possible explanation for this is that tolling causes users to more actively and frequently think about the value of the less congested lane, thus providing users with a better appreciation for the value of busing and carpooling.

While this data is preliminary and the samples are too small to make firm conclusions, it's apparent that widespread HOV-to-SOV conversions have not occurred.

MnPASS not only hasn't hurt HOV lanes, it may ultimately help to expand them. Remember, in recent years Mn/DOT has not built more HOV lanes in the Twin Cities because they cannot be justified on a benefit-cost basis. It's possible MnPASS could become a tool for expanding the HOV system beyond I-394 and I-35W and providing transit users with quicker and more reliable trips.

More self-sustaining

The top priority of the MnPASS pilot is to get more cars through the I-394 corridor without clogging the HOV lane. The top priority is not revenue generation. Still, revenue generation is a side benefit of this traffic management tool, and revenue is indeed being generated on I-394.

continued on page 10

FACTS UNFILTERED

Instant Runoff Voting

Each month, Citizens League members and staff will collaborate to select a timely policy topic, then ask the important—and sometimes uncomfortable—questions and dig up the answers. Just the facts, unadulterated and unspun.

Questions, comments, corrections? We need more Facts Unfiltered volunteers! If you are willing to roll up your sleeves and dig into the facts, if you have suggestions for a future Facts Unfiltered policy topic—or if you just think we got something wrong—email us at facts@citizensleague.net.

Q. What is Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)?

A. Instant Runoff Voting is a method of balloting that allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference.

Q. How does IRV work?

A. In elections with more than two candidates, IRV uses a ballot that allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference. If a candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote on the first ballot, that candidate wins the election. If, however, no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, then IRV simulates a series of runoff elections until one candidate receives a majority.

After the first ballot, only first-choice votes are counted; the candidate with the fewest first choice votes is dropped from the race. Then, the second choices of the dropped candidate's supporters are swapped in. The process is repeated until one candidate receives a majority of the votes. (For an electronic demonstration of how IRV works, go to www.chrisgates.net/irv/votesequence.html.)

Q. What are the arguments for and against using IRV?

A. FairVote Minnesota, which supports IRV, contends that “majority rule is a fundamental principle of democracy.” However, in the last 11 statewide races only one candidate was elected by a majority vote. IRV would ensure that elected officials earn the support of a majority of voters and provide the winning candidates with a stronger mandate for governance.

Proponents also argue that third-party candidates will no longer be perceived as spoilers who can tip an election from one major party to another. IRV can enrich the public debate by encouraging more candidates to run for office—and empowering voters to vote for who they really support, rather than the “lesser of two evils.” In addition, proponents argue, IRV decreases negative campaigning (because candidates need to work to become the second choice of voters from rival parties) and saves public money by eliminating the need in local elections for separate primary and general elections.

Opponents argue that IRV violates the principle of “one person, one vote” by allowing voters to place multiple votes by ranking candidates. Supporters point out that only one vote from each voter is counted; the difference is just that that vote is transferable throughout the process.

Opponents also argue that IRV will make ballots more confusing and voting more difficult. IRV ballots require voters to make a number of decisions in one race, opening up more opportunities for human error. In addition, the more candidates there are for a given position, the more difficult it is for voters to learn enough about each to make an informed decision.

Sample Ballot

Your preference for Governor of Minnesota

	1st	2nd	3rd
Norm Coleman	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hubert “Skip” Humphrey III	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jesse Ventura	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q. Where has IRV been used and what were the results?

A. Instant runoff voting is used in presidential elections in Ireland, parliamentary elections in Fiji and Australia, and local elections in a number of U.S. cities. In addition, several states allow IRV to be used by active-duty military and other overseas voters.

In 2004, San Francisco used a version of IRV to elect seven members of its board of supervisors. The Public Research Institute and San Francisco State University found that 87 percent of voters understood how IRV worked “perfectly” or “fairly” well. Sixty-one percent preferred IRV to standard voting systems, and 20 percent of those who said they preferred a standard runoff election (where a runoff election is held on a separate day) changed their minds after going through an IRV election.

In March of 2006, Burlington, Vt., used IRV to elect its mayor. In that election, Progressive Party candidate Bob Kiss defeated Democrat Hinda Miller on the second ballot. A headline in the Burlington Free Press the day after the election read: “Burlington Voters Ace Instant Runoff.” ●

SOURCES

Better Ballot Initiative: www.betterballot.org

Burlington Free Press: www.burlingtonfreepress.com

Chris Gates’ IRV Animation: www.chrisgates.net/irv

Fair Vote Minnesota: www.fairvotemn.org

Public Research Institute: pri.sfsu.edu



Could a Corporation for Public Gaming give us games that serve the common good?

by David Rejeski

Somewhere between the summer of 1946, when RCA put their first black-and-white television sets on the market, and 1951, when "I Love Lucy" appeared in American living rooms, television took off. The penetration of the technology was breathtaking, rising from 4.4 million families with TVs in 1950 to more than 50 million just 10 years later (over 85 percent of all American homes). In 1950, with only two channels available, TV viewing time by children had already reached 2.5 hours per day in some cities, prompting researchers to raise questions about the effects of this new mass medium on the developing personality of the child as well as impacts on relationships within the family.

Unlike television, the meteoric rise of computer and video games over the past decade has gone largely unnoticed except by the digiteratti and cultural anthropologists cruising web zines and blogs.

From the very beginning there were concerns about the psychological and social impacts of television and suspicions that TV was simply a technological funnel used to deliver advertising into the living rooms of millions of Americans. There was some truth to this assertion, since in the early days of TV, corporations literally owned shows, such as "Milton Berle's Texaco Star Theater." A formulaic approach to programming gave us 30 western series by 1958 (from "Gunsmoke" to "Have Gun—Will Travel") as well as the half-hour windows into the idealized middle class American family of Ozzie and Harriet or the Cleavers in "Leave It to Beaver." In 1961, Newton Minow, head of the Federal Communications Commission, made his now famous remark comparing TV programming to a "vast wasteland."

Though attempts were made to create alternative programming free from commercial influence, these proved difficult to sustain. A few dozen stations struggled to exist in the mid-1950s, dependent largely on millions of dollars of Ford Foundation funding for National Educational Television (NET), which provided noncommercial programming to around 200 stations nationwide.

The saccharine sweet family shows of the '50s and '60s gave way to harder biting social commentaries like "All in the Family." In 1967, the same year that CBS television ended a 17-year black-listing of folksinger Pete Seeger, President Johnson signed legislation to establish the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), asserting that "we have only begun to grasp the great promise of the medium" and noting that noncommercial television was reaching only "a fraction of its potential audience—and a fraction

of its potential worth." As part of the legislation, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was to launch major research on instructional television in the classroom. The \$9 million investment in CPB in 1967 (about \$47 million in today's dollars) has grown to over \$300 million in annual funding today.

Unlike television, the meteoric rise of computer and video games over the past decade has gone largely unnoticed except by the digiteratti and cultural anthropologists cruising web zines and blogs. This may be because games are not a technology per se, but applications that slip into our lives on the backs of existing technologies, from computers to televisions and cell phones. They are less hardware and more software.

Like many mass culture phenomena, games are understood more on the basis of prevailing myths than reality. Few people realize that the average gamer is 30 years old, that more than 40 percent are female, and that most adult gamers have been playing games for 12 years. One reason myths shape public perceptions is because few universities have seen computer games as worthy of serious academic study, robbing the discourse around games of robust data on their use characteristics, effects, and potential value. There is, of course, the annual Congressional attack on the game world and its denizens, calling for more control of violent games and, like our TV-addicted forbearers, warning of dire consequences to mind and family. Politicians have conveniently made computer games a target of derision rather than a pedagogical ally or tool for public engagement.

The best kept secret in the world of computer and video games is the rise of a movement—now in the thousands—of gamers dedicated to applying games to serious challenges such as education, training, medical treatment, or better government. The Serious Games movement is in many ways today's equivalent of yesterday's advocates for noncommercial, educational TV, who knew that the potential of the medium was unrealized and went far beyond pure entertainment.



Miles, one of the characters in the United Nation's computer simulation game Food Force in which players work to save and rebuild a fictional island.

continued on page 10

Public Gaming

continued from page 9

With small amounts of foundation money, and a lot of sweat equity and ingenuity, advocates of serious games are getting products built and used. A father with a diabetic son created GlucoBoy a handheld game that helps children better manage

However, serious games, like serious TV, are likely to remain a sidebar in the history of mass media.

their blood glucose levels. A state senator from Massachusetts worked with graduate students to create MassBalance, and challenged people to balance the state's budget online. The United Nations World Food Program recently launched Food Force, a game with more than 3 million players worldwide who work to save and rebuild the fictional island of Sheylan, ravished by drought and war. A number of people—or their virtual selves—come together in an online, multiplayer game called Second Life to help design a park for Queens, N.Y. The interactive nature of games, their ability to present complex and dynamic information, and, increasingly, to allow thousands of people to meet in sophisticated virtual environments means games can accomplish what TV never could in terms of addressing educational and social challenges.

However, serious games, like serious TV, are likely to remain a sidebar in the history of mass media. Noncommercial television floundered, despite millions of dollars of investment by the Ford Foundation, until the government stepped in and created a viable and long-lasting alternative. With similar vision and foresight,

and a relatively small amount of funding, this could happen with video and computer games.

A Corporation for Public Gaming (CPG) could be established that would operate on a model similar to its broadcasting equivalent, providing grants to develop a diversity of games for the public good. Like CPB, the goal of the CPG would be to provide high-quality games, which “inform, enlighten and enrich the public.” A \$15 million annual investment would be made for a three-year period with a review conducted at the end of year three followed by recommendations for continuance, modification, or termination of the program. Grants would be made available to qualified nonprofits that could partner with commercial game developers, universities, museums, schools, or government entities. All grants would require a 15 percent set aside to support a rigorous evaluation of the game's impact. A portion of the overall funding would go to universities to conduct research on how to improve the content, impact, and evaluation of such games. An alternative model would be to support serious games within the existing Corporation for Public Broadcasting, by increasing the appropriation and changing the allocation formula from the 75-25 percent split between television and radio to one that reflected the additional funding for games.

Granted, it would take vision and courage to create such an entity, especially today when the concept of public broadcasting has become politicized and compromised. But without such a commitment to serious games, we may find that in 20 years we have managed to create another “vast wasteland” out of a promising new mass medium. ●

David Fejeski is Director of the Foresight and Governance Project and the Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.

The article was originally published online at Serious Games Source (www.seriousgamesource.com), a website created to discuss games for health, education, political, military, and other uses.

MnPass

continued from page 7

More than 9,500 drivers have opened MnPASS accounts, and these users are steadily paying tolls as they use the MnPASS lane an average of two times per week.

Overall revenue is expected to increase in years to come as overall traffic in this corridor increases and more consumers become more comfortable using the MnPASS option.



It appears the I-394 MnPASS project probably will become fully self-sufficient before long. Though revenue generation is not the main objective of this project, self-sufficiency is no small feat in an age of transportation finance scarcity.

An effective management tool

The I-394 MnPASS experience, coupled with the completion of a MnPASS System Study conducted by the Metropolitan Council and Mn/DOT in spring 2005, led both agencies to adopt a policy requiring MnPASS lanes to be actively considered for future highway projects in congested corridors.

Again, there is no silver bullet when it comes to transportation, including MnPASS. MnPASS can't and won't eliminate congestion. But we have learned in the past year that MnPASS is an effective new traffic management tool. And with the transportation challenges we collectively face, that's welcome news. ●

John Doan, P.E. is the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)/MnPASS Program Director for the Minnesota Department of Transportation and Lee W. Munnich, Jr. is a Senior Fellow at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. Both are members of the Citizens League.

PERSPECTIVES

Expanding Minnesota's Conversation



Read all about it: the Twin Cities Daily Planet

A new marketplace for our ideas, our opinions and our community news

by Craig Cox

Ranting about the sorry state of our mass media has become almost a spectator sport. From the embarrassing “retirement” of Dan Rather at CBS News and the ludicrous “fair and balanced” hype of the FOX network nationally to the gradual evisceration of local news in our two daily newspapers and the embarrassing ratings-week “investigations” perpetrated on viewers of local TV news, the state of journalism is in a steep decline.

Part of the problem, of course, is that those who publish the news have shifted their attention from serving citizens to serving so-called “information consumers.” Say what you will about the *Star Tribune's* recent makeover, there was no mention in any of the newspaper's public discussion of the redesign about the role of the press as a linchpin of democracy. Everything the folks at the *Strib* were doing to jazz up the paper was done to satisfy consumers of news—not to enlighten and engage citizens in the heavy lifting that self-government requires.

This is, pure and simple, an abdication of the vital role the press plays in this society. And it's led to a proliferation of small-press publishing—both in print and online—designed to tell the stories the major media are ignoring and to encourage citizens to become more engaged in the life of their communities. You can see this vast diversity of news and opinion in most local coffee shops, where on any given day you'll be able to pick up newspapers serving the local African, Native American, Hmong, or Latino communities, along with neighborhood-based publications that report local news as part of a larger community-building effort.

The challenge for these publications—and the rapidly growing number of local blogs—is to find a broader audience so their work can help to educate readers beyond their small demographic or geographic niches. With the launch this spring of the Twin Cities Daily Planet (www.tcdailyplanet.net), they now have a

We hope these basic courses in journalistic practices and ethics will equip people from across the Twin Cities with the tools to tell the stories that most affect them and their community.

vehicle to reach a regional audience that would otherwise have little exposure to these important voices.

The Daily Planet is an online newspaper and community newswire that collects and publishes stories from more than 30 local media partners, from *Hmong Today* and the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder* to *The Northeaster* and the *St. Anthony Park Bugle*. That means that, every day of the week, you'll find news, opinion, and analysis seldom featured in the daily newspapers or on TV news. And that, we believe, will provide a shot in the arm to our ailing sense of community.

The Daily Planet also offers audio links to KFAI community radio and local independent podcasters as well as a direct line to the burgeoning community of local video producers like Chuck Olson of Minnesota Stories. And local photographers are telling their stories in our evolving photo gallery.

All of these are vehicles for people whose voices traditionally have been marginalized in our society. But in order to enable these people to tell their stories most effectively, the Daily Planet's

publisher, the nonprofit Twin Cities Media Alliance (TCMA), also offers workshops for aspiring citizen-journalists. We hope these basic courses in journalistic practices and ethics will equip people from across the Twin Cities with the tools to tell the stories that most affect them and their community.

In 2000, an enterprising South Korean journalist named Oh Yeon Ho launched an online civic journalism project called Ohmy News. Six years later, the publication has recruited some 38,000 registered citizen-journalists and has become a major media player in the country. The Daily Planet is not that ambitious, but we do believe we can change the traditional relationship between readers and reporters in the Twin Cities by giving readers the tools to become part of the media they depend upon for news and information. And we think we can also change the shape of the local news menu by drawing attention to the perspectives and stories offered by the remarkable mix of local media with which we are blessed in the Twin Cities.

It may be easy to complain about the current sorry state of the news media. But it's more satisfying to explore the rich offerings that lie beneath the radar of our mainstream culture. And I'm confident that the Daily Planet will help thousands of readers discover that treasure trove of fresh ideas, compelling stories, and important issues bubbling up from newspapers most of us have never heard of. By allowing these publications—and citizens themselves—to create a news diet, we'll not only be delivering better information, we'll be building a better community in the process. ●

Craig Cox is the managing editor of the Twin Cities Daily Planet and the Minneapolis Observer.

06/20

Register Now

Mind Opener: More Choices. More Care. More Cost?

Developing a Consumer Voice to Reform the Health Care Market

With Cal Ludeman, Commissioner of Employee Relations; Cardyn Pare, CEO of the Business Health Care Action Group; and Jerry Wolfel, Compensation and Benefits Vice President, Securian Financial Group.

Join us to hear what large purchasers think about the ideas in the report of the Medical Facilities Study Committee and to start the discussion to move these ideas toward implementation in 2007.

The Forum at MPR, downtown St. Paul. Registration at 7 a.m., program at 7:30 a.m.

10/23

Save the Date

Citizens League Annual Meeting

Save the date for the biggest Citizens League event of the year. The Depot, downtown Minneapolis. Reception starts at 5 p.m.

For more information or to register, click to www.citizensleague.net/events.

Find more events like this on the Community Connections Calendar: www.pointclickengage.org.

PERIODICALS



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