



# BETTER CONNECTIONS FOR MINNESOTA'S FUTURE

## INTERREGIONAL CORRIDOR STUDY



*"A strong system of interregional corridors that provides safe and efficient transportation between Minnesota's regional trade centers will ensure competitive access to markets and services and easy connections to tourist and recreational areas."*

— Elwyn Tinklenberg  
Commissioner of Transportation

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## ► STATEWIDE CONNECTIONS

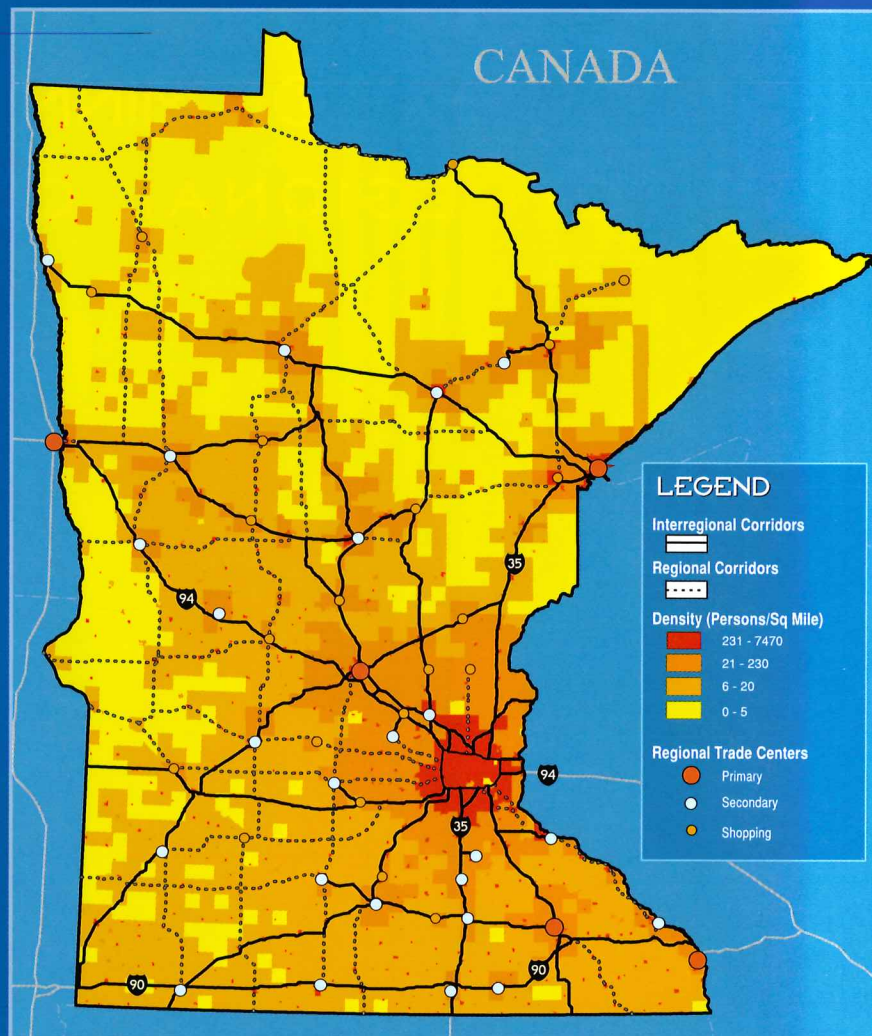
### The Road to Economic Vitality

Concern about traffic congestion and loss of mobility on our highways and interstates led Mn/DOT to conduct an Interregional Corridor Study, completed in October 1999. The goal of the Study is to proactively manage the important connections between regional centers in a more cost-effective manner. This goal is consistent with Mn/DOT's strategic objective to develop an interregional corridor system that enhances the economic vitality of the state by providing safe, timely, and efficient movement of people and goods to regional trade centers.

### Interregional Corridors Support a Growing Economy

Interregional corridors tie the state together. They support Minnesota's economic health by connecting people with jobs, distributors with manufacturers, shoppers with retailers, and tourists with recreational opportunities. Our population is growing as people discover that Minnesota is a great place to live and work. During the 1990s, the population in Minnesota's trade centers grew by 10.2 percent, compared to 7.5 percent in other areas. This growth is expected to increase. The highest level of economic activity is happening in centers like St. Cloud, Rochester, and the Twin Cities – the economic hub of Minnesota and the upper Midwest.

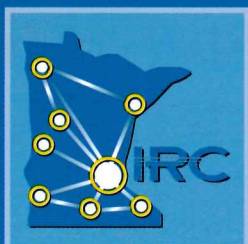
### Population Concentrations



*Areas in and around the 50 regional trade centers shown represent 90% of the state's population and employment.*

### Minnesota Citizens Expect Quick, Safe Travel

The consistent response of people we talked to statewide is that travelers want quick, safe travel between regional trade centers with a minimum of stops, especially on longer trips. Businesses want their people and goods to reach their destinations quickly, safely, and predictably. Delay costs money and affects the ability of businesses to meet customer expectations.





# REGIONAL TRADE CENTERS AND THE INTERREGIONAL CORRIDOR SYSTEM



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## ► TRAFFIC IS INCREASING

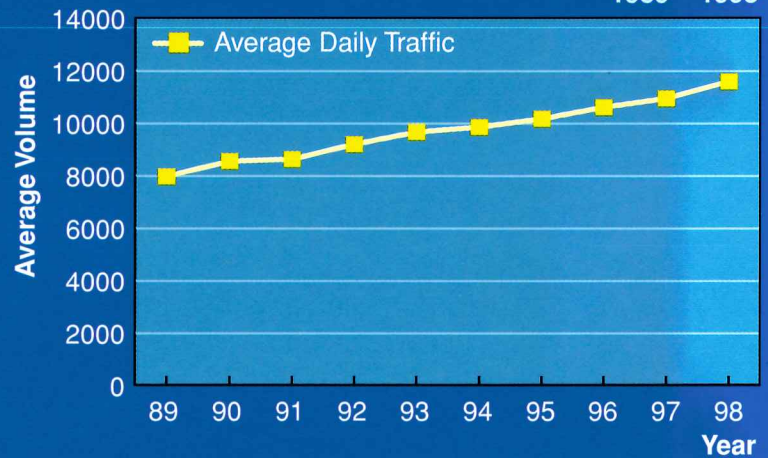
### Growth Increases Traffic Congestion

Growth trends further threaten the efficiency of the transportation connections between trade centers statewide and nationwide. Our highway system is a magnet for development. Retailers locate near large volumes of traffic that represent a powerful customer base. This adds to the congestion on interregional corridors that also serve long-distance travel. Traffic volumes on the interregional corridor system have risen by 50 percent in the last 10 years and are anticipated to double by the year 2020. Already, 30 percent of all statewide travel is concentrated on these corridors, which represent only 2 percent of the highways in the state.

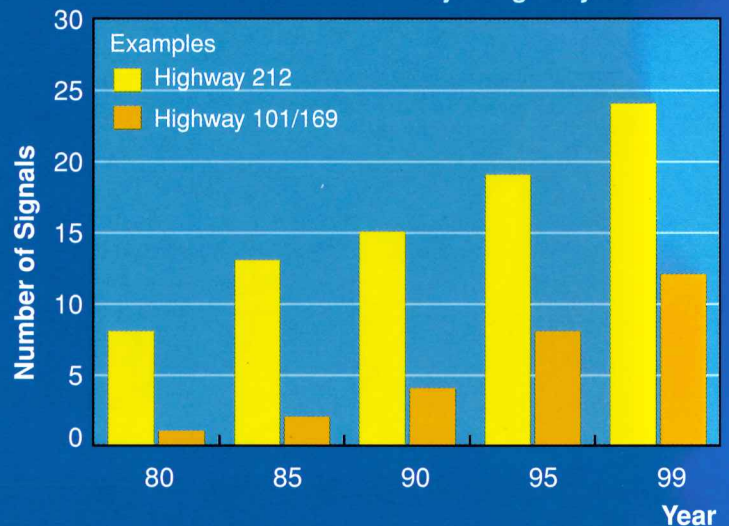
### Traffic Signals Reduce Mobility

A major challenge for transportation officials is improving mobility or preventing loss of mobility on interregional corridors passing through developing urban areas. Increased traffic and accidents on these highways can lead to the installation of more traffic signals. While signals can improve safety and minimize cross-street delays, they also reduce the ability of highways to carry travelers to their statewide destinations. For example, 16 signals added on Highway 212 between I-494 and Granite Falls over the past 20 years have increased delays and travel times. Eleven signals were added on Highway 101/169 between I-94 and Garrison (Mille Lacs Lake) with similar results.

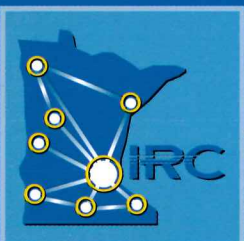
Volume Changes on Interregional Corridors  
1989 – 1998



Increase in Signals  
Major Highway Corridors

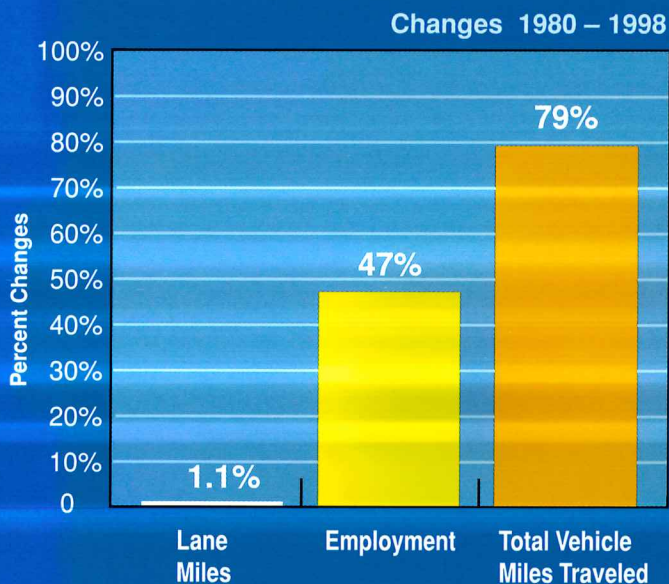


If we continue at our current rate of growth and limited level of investment, 28 percent of the interregional corridor system will be performing below the expectations of the traveling public by 2020.





## ► INVESTMENTS ARE LAGGING



### Demand Outpaces Improvements

Public investments to improve the state highway system have not kept pace with the demands of our changing economy. Since 1980, employment in Minnesota grew by 47 percent. During the same time, the total vehicle miles traveled increased by 79 percent. However, during the 1990s, public investment in highways, as a percentage of the Gross State Product, declined from 1.18 percent to .88 percent. This trend is expected to continue while Minnesota directs most of its present funds toward preserving and managing the system already in place. As bridges and roads wear out and the cost to replace them rises, funds available to meet expanding demands will become even smaller.

### Inaction is Costly

The longer we wait to make improvements or preserve right-of-way, the more difficult and costly these improvements become. In highly developed areas, costs to purchase adjacent property limit opportunities for highway expansion. The high cost of materials and traffic control during construction also add to the capital costs. For example, the right-of-way costs per acre for Highway 212 have increased ten times since 1992. Immediate improvements on congested corridors could reduce the long-term costs and improve safety and mobility.



*"Every mile of highway in the state is important and we are committed to maintaining them. However, we need to be sure we make adequate investments in the few miles of the system that have the greatest impact on our economic vitality."*

Doug Weiszhaar  
Mn/DOT Deputy Commissioner



## ► COURSE OF ACTION

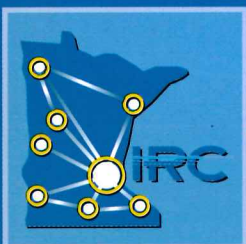
### The Interregional Corridor Study

The Interregional Corridor Study analyzed all the major highways in the state and identified a system of interregional corridors based on community use and traffic volumes. The 2,930 miles of highway identified tie our largest economic centers together. The Study also identified investment needs for interregional corridor segments that are now, or are at risk of, performing poorly. These investment needs will become a critical element of the discussion about transportation financing over the next two years.

The Interregional Corridor Study will provide direction through Mn/DOT's State Transportation Plan, which sets policy for investments on the state's 12,000-mile trunk highway system.

### Recommendations:

1. **Mn/DOT should formally establish the system of interregional corridors to guide future decisions:**
  - Adopt the system in the State Transportation Plan
  - Establish operating guidelines for interregional corridors
  - Establish indicators for monitoring the traffic mobility performance of the interregional corridor system
2. **Mn/DOT, in cooperation with local units of government, should establish a management plan on each interregional corridor:**
  - Identify growth and development needs
  - Integrate state land-use and transportation policy direction
  - Develop land-use controls and ordinances that guide how local traffic will access the highway
3. **Develop a long-term strategy for maintaining mobility, including limiting new traffic signals and traffic demand in urban areas**
  - Integrate state and local transportation investment decisions
3. **Focus new funding on needed improvements for parts of the interregional corridor system that are now or will be operating below performance targets:**
  - Prioritize and invest in improvements that preserve mobility on the interregional corridor system
  - Identify and fund access management projects to manage congestion and requests for new signals
  - Acquire right-of-way property for highway use before growth and land-use pressures drive up costs
  - Remove bottlenecks in the Twin Cities metro area and in other regional trade centers
4. **Continue to integrate a wide variety of transportation services in these corridors and ensure that appropriate updates are made:**
  - Evaluate ways to integrate fiber optic, bicycle, pedestrian, and airport access
  - Incorporate freight and transit service needs
  - Coordinate connections between the state highway and local road network
  - Regularly update analyses of growth in regional trade centers and changes in weekend and seasonal traffic





## ► AT RISK CORRIDORS<sup>(1)</sup>



<sup>(1)</sup> Interregional Corridors that perform below public expectations and/or have a medium-to-high risk of signal proliferation.

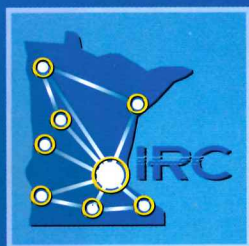




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For more information about Mn/DOT's Interregional Corridor Study or to get a copy of the executive summary or the full report, call (651) 297-7860 or e-mail us at [irc@dot.state.mn.us](mailto:irc@dot.state.mn.us). Additional information and PDF formats of the reports are available on the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Interregional Corridor Study Web site at:  
<http://www.oim.dot.state.mn.us/projects/irc/index.html>



*Supporting the State's Economic Vitality in the New Millennium*