Streets.mn Questionnaire

Name: Chris Lautenschlager
Office Sought: Minneapolis City Council, Ward 12

1. What do you believe is the most significant land use and/or transportation issue facing Minneapolis in the next 5 years and how do you hope to address it in office?

The most significant overall issue facing Minneapolis is expanding our regional transportation network and effectively managing new development along these current and future transit corridors. If we tackle these interrelated issues right, I believe our city (and our region) will have many less things go wrong.

First, our transit network needs to be rapidly built-out. Strong investments in transportation infrastructure have proven to attract businesses and help retain the ones already here. Regional transit better connects suburban employers with potential employees who prefer to live in Minneapolis (too often we think of transit connections moving people towards the center, rather than away from it). These investments not only help to keep residents, but they draw new ones who want to both live and work in Minneapolis. Nationwide, college graduates want to go to where the jobs are, but they also want to live in cities where they are not forced into immediately purchasing a car.

All of this helps to build our population density, a necessary ingredient for increasing our overall tax base, and therefore allows the city to decrease property taxes. Expanding our transit network generates opportunities for residential development; it creates and diversifies our housing stock and alleviates the stress of our city's remarkably low vacancy rate.

I support the legislation proposed by the Transit for a Stronger Economy coalition. I hope that a regional transportation sales tax bill will be signed into law in the next couple of weeks. Any new revenue should be split in 3 ways:

- Rapid build-out of LRT: dedicated funding for extending the Green and Blue Lines (Southwest and Bottineau).
- Enhance bus services: adding new BRT, arterial BRT, and local lines, improvements to bus shelters.
- Improve overall bicycle infrastructure, crosswalks, sidewalks, pedestrian access, and provide for overall winter maintenance.

Yet we are obligated to make sure that any new business or residential developments along these new transit corridors don't replicate the troubling, sprawling suburban development we often see. We need smart, well-designed buildings: developments that add to our communities and not divide them, structures that look like homes with front doors and not warehouses with dominating walls.

Proper build-out along these transit corridors should compel Minneapolis to adopt a form-based code approach rather than continue the traditional zoning rules that have made our neighborhoods seem so disjointed. This approach, where we take the emphasis off of "use," and instead focus on the design and placement of buildings provides greater flexibility and overall appeal for all parties involved: architects, planners, developers, and most importantly, the public. A form-based code can accelerate the speed at which developments can happen, as developers and project planners can better avoid the typical reviews and appeals that often plague the development process. Moreover, the public can remain in the know about the process for the entire length of a project and have a decisive say in it.

These types of developments in other communities have added to the atmosphere of a place (indeed, in many cases, they make A Place), they don't simply add ridership numbers for a train, streetcar, or enhanced bus travelling to the center of a city.

2. How do you think the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and drivers can be met most effectively? Would you prioritize one or more of these modes over others?

There are three points to make.

First, the obvious—there clearly needs to be balanced attention to all modes of travel, by foot or on wheels. We need to make sure our streets and intersections, our sidewalks and crosswalks work for everyone.

Second, there is little doubt that overall road design and transportation projects have clearly favored 4+ wheeled vehicles—at the expense of everyone else—for generations. The balance I mentioned above requires the city to make improvements for anyone travelling our street network without the privilege of an automobile. If I were to prioritize any mode, it would be through investments in walking or biking that would fully render them viable alternatives to motor vehicle use.

We not only need to make sure that pedestrians have enough time to cross the street, we need to guarantee that crosswalks are clearly marked and the pavement itself is free from monstrous potholes that would force the elderly, wheelchair users, or stroller pushers to widen their path (I witnessed this issue just yesterday, while watching a wheelchair negotiate the southern crossing at Hiawatha and 38th). Adding more bike lanes requires the city (and Hennepin County) to be more mindful of vehicular traffic turns at intersections—bicyclists shouldn't get right hooked by a turning car.

The city also needs to make a concerted effort to slow motorized vehicles down. This isn't just a matter of decreasing speed limits, but putting traffic calming measures in place: narrowing lanes, adding curb extensions and pedestrian refuges in the middle of

the street (wherever possible), and converting one-way streets into two-ways. These measures are minimum recommendations.

This balance is also achieved in another way: education. There should be an increased push to teach all network users on how to make the system *work* for everyone. I believe in stronger education initiatives that can help drivers understand what a painted sharrow means, and help bicyclists get the idea that it is simply wrong to bike the wrong way down a one-way street.

Third, despite the fact that we are making valiant strides at diversifying our modes, we can't completely avoid investments in our road infrastructure. As residents, as workers, and sometimes as travellers, some people still need to use a vehicle. The hope, of course, is to make these trips more infrequent, but no matter how this city rebalances our network, it cannot afford to neglect the roadways that we obviously still need. The trick, however, will be maintaining and strengthening our roadways without negatively impacting our other modes of travel.

3. Minneapolis has many plans for land use, transit, road and cycling infrastructure improvements in plans like Access Minneapolis, the Bicycle Master Plan and the city's comprehensive plan. How do you think the city should fund these improvements in the future? Other than funding, are there other obstacles to realizing these plans and how would you address them?

Earlier I mentioned my hope for the passage of a regional transit sales tax that would be a major source of funding for transit, bicycling, and other pedestrian uses. This minimal tax (anywhere between one-half cent to a full-cent) could help raise hundreds of millions of dollars annually for improvements to bike infrastructure, bus routes and light rail service, and street lighting, to mention only a few.

The city could also look into increasing parking surcharges for its downtown ramps and lots, as well as diverting some fees it collects from critical parking permits (especially if these permits will be more widely implemented as more transit options become available).

Beyond funding, there are two other obstacles in the way of implementing these various plans.

First, it's a matter of leadership. Our communities need to take advantage of road resurfacing projects that are already planned, using them as opportunities to include better pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. This requires leadership that can effectively galvanize community members. Yet the only way a representative can rouse public input is if constituents already feel like they have a relationship (even if adversarial) with their elected official. The public needs to feel that their representative is open,

responsive, and sincerely willing to listen to all input, not to just the most agreeable voices.

Secondly, not only do I believe that the public would be more interested once they have a more open relationship with their representative (truly believing that a potential project component hadn't already been largely decided by officials, actually thinking that the public input meeting wasn't merely a mandated formality), but I also believe that they would be eager to push for some of these plans once they realize that the outcomes foster a reliable and safe multi-modal network.

In short, we need better public awareness.

4. As a council person, how would you respond to concerns about development impacts in your ward? Outside of your ward? Is there a recent controversial project (land use or transportation) that you would have handled differently?

There is an undeniable demand for rental housing throughout our city, and an undeniable opportunity for new housing developments throughout the twelfth ward.

That being said, no matter the project—from the Lime Building near Lyn-Lake, to Creekside Commons near Diamond Lake, to the multiple proposals for Howe School, the Simpson Housing plan for 42nd and Hiawatha back in 2005, or the recently constructed Oaks Station Place—there are inevitably concerns about all housing projects. Some residents argue that their quality of life will be diminished by the new addition of a market-rate apartment building. Other residents argue that their quality of life will be diminished by the new addition of affordable housing.

Some long-time residents simply aren't willing to tolerate any changes to their neighborhood. Luckily, a majority of them are.

The job of a City Council member is to not only listen to community concerns and explore how they could be accommodated (whether that deals with set backs or parking or noise), but there also remains a duty to be willing to argue over what is in the best interest of the overall community. Considering the historically low vacancy rate in this city, as well as the need to broaden our tax base, Minneapolis needs housing: market-rate, mixed-income, and affordable. I would staunchly defend well-designed, neighborhood-oriented proposals that would make living in this city more affordable, expand our tax base, and rehabilitate underused properties.

Yet this question did not specify housing developments, just developments. If there is one controversial project I would have handled differently the choice is simple: the Vikings stadium.

By now, most arguments against the City Council's 7-6 vote are well-known: it was wrong to invest in a billion dollar stadium to relieve us of a relatively insignificant, low-interest Target Center debt, it was wrong to lock up our downtown sales taxes for decades, it was wrong to merely think of this stadium as $150 million city contribution (when the numbers are significantly higher than that), it was wrong to base a decision off of a city attorney's oral (not written) opinion, and most importantly, it was wrong to violate our City Charter.

Then, as now, I believe in all of these arguments. I would not have voted in favor of the stadium.

5. Where is your favorite place to walk (in or outside of Minneapolis)?

Avenue A in New York City.

I used to live on East 4th between Avenues A and B about ten years ago, and still today this short walk—barely over a dozen blocks—remains my favorite stretch of any city.

Unlike the dull roar of traffic on nearby 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Avenues, or the relatively sleepy avenues in the rest of Alphabet City, Avenue A always seems to sustain the best level of controlled chaos in the neighborhood. It has two-way traffic and bike lanes in each direction, so the pace of the street always seems lively yet calm (relatively speaking).

Avenue A supports an impossibly eclectic set of businesses, and even as you walk it daily, there is always a new discovery. You can buy most anything and you can dine and drink on sidewalks almost anywhere. It has a flea market. It has its own urban oasis: Tompkins Square Park.

Finally, it smells simultaneously awful and wonderful, as most great streets do.

In Minneapolis, it's an entirely different answer—the path along Minnehaha Creek that leads to Minnehaha Falls. It's the nearest, safest outdoor stretch (beyond our yard) that my 2-year-old daughter can walk and run without randomly darting into traffic. Except for simply crossing the street, we can walk for nearly 20 minutes without having to cross another. I love that my daughter (and my son, not quite yet 1 year old) can be immersed in a ridiculously beautiful natural environment while being in the middle of a respectably large metropolitan area. Or, to put it another way, I am happy that my kids are growing up in a neighborhood that has both ducks and light-rail trains passing through it.