



Legislation Text

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RESOLUTION DECLARING THE CITY COUNCIL'S SUPPORT FOR FORMALLY REEVALUATING THE CITY'S DOWNTOWN I-35 CORRIDOR. (REPLACEMENT)

BY COUNCILORS FORSMAN, FILIPOVICH, RANDORF AND ANDERSON:

WHEREAS, Interstate 35 (I-35) presents a considerable infrastructure barrier between the city's Central Hillside neighborhood, Downtown, and waterfront; and

WHEREAS, the Minnesota department of transportation is planning to do a full evaluation of the I-35 system within Duluth's city limits; and

WHEREAS, transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Minnesota, and the city of Duluth set a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050; and

WHEREAS, low-carbon transportation modes are essential to providing transportation choices and accessibility while combating climate change and reducing economic disparities; and

WHEREAS, emerging mobility options and related infrastructure such as bicycle trails, protected bicycle lanes, and low-carbon electric bicycles and scooters create local travel opportunities that are inexpensive, safe, fast, and convenient that do not rely on an interstate highway; and

WHEREAS, 54 percent of residents living in downtown Duluth (Census tract 19) live below the federal poverty threshold; and

WHEREAS, 31.8 percent of residents in the Central Hillside, Downtown, and Park Point neighborhood do not own a vehicle and an interstate highway is by default exclusive to vehicle traffic only; and

WHEREAS, the Imagine Duluth 2035 Comprehensive Plan identifies the city's desire to execute the following policies:

- (a) Improve street conditions to function better for everyone;
- (b) Reduce infrastructure costs through innovation and wholesale design change;
- (c) Add to the transportation network by systematically enhancing multi-modal options;
- (d) Improve system condition and connections in and between downtown and Canal Park; and
- (e) Base decisions about transportation infrastructure primarily in the context of improving city and neighborhood vitality, and not on automobile through traffic; and

WHEREAS, a local grassroots organization, the Duluth Waterfront Collective, has proposed an alternative concept to the current I-35 which would advance the aforementioned policies and provide space for making progress on the city's goals for building a more equitable, sustainable, and connected city; and

WHEREAS, proposed federal legislation such as the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act, the Reconnecting Communities Act (S.1202), and the Restoring Neighborhoods and Strengthening Communities Program (H.R.2859) could fund the exploration of alternatives to I-35 in a formal capacity; and

WHEREAS, many cities have successfully removed interstate highways from their city cores to the benefit of increased economic activity, city tax revenue, environmental condition, and quality of life without adversely impacting traffic; and

WHEREAS, the opportunity to repurpose land in downtown Duluth currently occupied by the freeway has the potential to provide a significant boost to economic development, housing development, population growth, and job creation, and is worthy of further study.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the city council supports efforts to reimagine the downtown I-35 corridor between Mesaba Avenue and the Giche-Ode Akiing tunnel and requests the city administration collaborate with the Metropolitan Interstate Council, the Minnesota department of transportation, and grassroots organizations like the Duluth Waterfront Collective to review and/or apply for federal funds to assess the feasibility of reimagining this corridor, especially should a federal program funding such work be

enacted into law.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the city council requests the city administration support efforts by the Metropolitan Interstate Council, MnDOT, and grassroots organizations like the Duluth Waterfront Collective to assess the outcomes of maintaining the downtown I-35 corridor between Mesaba Avenue and the Giche-Ode Akiing tunnel as-is in comparison to potential removal concepts for the purpose of better understanding how concepts and future options may affect outcomes related to transportation, economic activity, environmental condition, tax revenue generation, and quality of life for Duluth residents.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the city council recommends the establishment of long-term visions for the downtown I-35 corridor between Mesaba Avenue and the Giche-Ode Akiing tunnel.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the city council recommends city and public partners (Metropolitan Interstate Council, MnDOT, etc.) apply for funds to study the potential transition of the downtown I-35 corridor to be a more inclusive transportation network, including pedestrian and bike routes to and from Canal Park, Downtown, Lincoln Park, Bayfront, and other neighborhoods; large truck and freight traffic; and emerging trends such as electric scooters, autonomous vehicles, etc.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The purpose of this resolution is to declare the city council's support for efforts to reimagine the downtown I-35 corridor between Mesaba Avenue and the Giche-Ode Akiing tunnel by requesting the city administration work with local partners to evaluate and apply for potential federal grant programs which could fund a preliminary assessment of the feasibility of removing this specific I-35 corridor, and help gain a better understanding of how this concept could advance a number of the City's transportation, climate, economic, housing, neighborhood vitality, and other goals.