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State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETIETH SESSION

H. F. No. **1479**

02/20/2017 Authored by Runbeck, Koznick, Smith, Scott, Pugh and others  
The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Transportation and Regional Governance Policy

1.1 A resolution  
1.2 requesting that the United States Secretary of Transportation redirect federal funds  
1.3 from Southwest Light Rail to a block grant to fund other transit projects in the state.

1.4 WHEREAS, efficient, affordable, and accessible public transportation is an essential  
1.5 component of a thriving and robust economy; and

1.6 WHEREAS, the Legislature of the State of Minnesota supports public investment in  
1.7 transportation infrastructure that is cost-effective, sustainable, and can adjust to changing  
1.8 demographics as well as readily adopt innovative technology; and

1.9 WHEREAS, the proposed Southwest Light Rail Transit (SWLRT) Project, an extension of  
1.10 the Metro Green Line, if built at a capital cost of nearly \$2,000,000,000 will be by far the single  
1.11 largest public works project in Minnesota's history; and

1.12 WHEREAS, SWLRT, as planned, will not be affordable, accessible, sustainable, or adjustable  
1.13 as transportation needs change, nor can it readily adopt newer and more affordable technologies;  
1.14 and

1.15 WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council's process regarding SWLRT has been widely perceived  
1.16 by the public and by the Minnesota Senate as high-handed, opaque, deceptive, and intended to  
1.17 exclude meaningful public participation and legislative oversight; and

1.18 WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council has represented that SWLRT will be funded through  
1.19 a mix of federal, state, and local sources, with funds from Minnesota taxpayers making up  
1.20 approximately one-half of the total cost to construct the project; and

1.21 WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council, a wholly unelected body, has, at the Governor's  
1.22 direction, engaged in a series of maneuvers that it has publicly acknowledged are intended to avoid  
1.23 meaningful legislative review and public scrutiny of SWLRT; and

2.1 WHEREAS, the Minnesota Legislature has not held a single vote nor passed any act that  
2.2 could be interpreted as legislative approval of SWLRT; and

2.3 WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council's current SWLRT funding scheme of utilizing  
2.4 Certificates of Participation, a form of indebtedness, is a self-proclaimed attempt to circumvent the  
2.5 right of the Minnesota Legislature to evaluate and authorize SWLRT; and

2.6 WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council's utilization of Certificates of Participation further  
2.7 constitutes an express breach of its promise to the Minnesota Legislature and to the Federal Transit  
2.8 Administration that it would not resort to such a financing mechanism in the absence of legislative  
2.9 authorization; and

2.10 WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council's source of funds for repayment of the Certificates of  
2.11 Participation is not fully known, but will ultimately be at the expense of other, more meritorious  
2.12 transportation needs; and

2.13 WHEREAS, notwithstanding overwhelming evidence of the upside-down cost-benefit of  
2.14 SWLRT, it is the Metropolitan Council's stated expectation that the Minnesota Legislature will  
2.15 provide 50 percent of the ongoing SWLRT net operating subsidy in perpetuity, as provided under  
2.16 current statute; and

2.17 WHEREAS, the proposed light rail system bypasses the most densely populated, most  
2.18 transit-dependent, largely minority populations in the metro area, even though the Twin Cities area  
2.19 is home to some of the worst racial disparities in America; and

2.20 WHEREAS, SWLRT, by bypassing transit-dependent populations, will result in fewer  
2.21 dependable riders, lower fare box revenue, and missed opportunities for underserved populations  
2.22 to access jobs and important regional resources; and

2.23 WHEREAS, SWLRT will replace the existing SouthWest Transit bus service, which is a  
2.24 popular and heavily utilized transit option that delivers riders at twice the speed of SWLRT; and

2.25 WHEREAS, the current SWLRT plan proposes spending \$260,000,000 for private freight  
2.26 rail right-of-way acquisitions and new freight rail infrastructure, would expand the Metropolitan  
2.27 Council's mission into freight rail operations, and raise unanswered questions about liability; and

2.28 WHEREAS, if built, SWLRT will adversely affect the quality of the Minneapolis Chain of  
2.29 Lakes, a nationally recognized and lauded public amenity that is part of the National Scenic Byway  
2.30 that serves and delights citizens from all parts of the State of Minnesota and visitors from around  
2.31 the nation and the world; and

2.32 WHEREAS, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board expressed grave concern and  
2.33 reservation about SWLRT intrusion into the Chain of Lakes, but was prevented from discharging  
2.34 its legal obligation to protect this fragile resource under Section 4(f) of the Federal Transportation

3.1 Act when Minnesota's Governor threatened to withhold essential state financial support from the  
3.2 Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; NOW, THEREFORE,

3.3 BE IT RESOLVED by the Legislature of the State of Minnesota that it declares that further  
3.4 investment in SWLRT would be counterproductive to the State of Minnesota's transportation and  
3.5 environmental interests, would be grossly wasteful, and would recklessly consume scarce transit  
3.6 resources well into the future for a project of questionable value.

3.7 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature of the State of Minnesota hereby further  
3.8 declares its opposition to the continued funding and construction of SWLRT as currently planned  
3.9 and calls for a halt to the project until a full financial projection and plan showing the sources of  
3.10 capital, operations, maintenance, and replacement funds, and understandable repayment mechanisms  
3.11 that do not unduly burden the taxpayers of Minnesota is prepared.

3.12 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature of the State of Minnesota urges the  
3.13 United States Secretary of Transportation to redirect federal funding of SWLRT to a block grant  
3.14 of equal size to fund Minnesota's more pressing and more broadly supported transit options.

3.15 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of State of the State of Minnesota is directed  
3.16 to prepare copies of this memorial and transmit them to the President of the United States, the  
3.17 President and the Secretary of the United States Senate, the Speaker and the Clerk of the United  
3.18 States House of Representatives, the chair of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and  
3.19 Urban Affairs, the chair of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the United  
3.20 States Secretary of Transportation, and Minnesota's Senators and Representatives in Congress.