



Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger
Minnesota Department of Transportation
395 John Ireland Boulevard
Saint Paul, MN 55155

September 11, 2026

Re: Please include an extension of Highway 169 project funding availability in MnDOT's 2027 agency priorities

On behalf of the U.S. Highway 169 Range Gateway Coalition (RGC), we write to urge you to include an extension of the availability of funds for Highway 169 between Taconite and Pengilly in Itasca County through June 30, 2030 in MnDOT's agency priorities for the 2027 legislative session.

RGC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization bringing together local governments, businesses, chambers of commerce, nonprofits, individuals, and other groups from throughout northern Minnesota with the shared goal of making Highway 169 a safe and efficient route for everyone who travels throughout the Iron Range. The group's current focus is the four-lane expansion of the remaining 8 miles of two-lane highway between Taconite and Pengilly.

In 2023, the Legislature appropriated \$6 million to advance this project (Laws of Minnesota, 2023 chapter 68, article 1, section 17). With the help of Senators Klobuchar and Smith, the federal government followed suit in 2024 by appropriating \$4.889 million through a Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) request that was included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-42).

The combined state and federal support for this project, currently totaling \$10.889 million, means we have an unprecedented opportunity to move this project forward: we can advance construction of two miles of highway and significantly improve safety on the corridor, but only if MnDOT and our coalition work together with the Legislature in 2027.

For years, MnDOT District 1 has worked closely with the Federal Highway Administration to move the project forward, and the recent execution of a contract between MnDOT and SRF Consulting allows the next phase of work to proceed in earnest. Unfortunately, the \$6 million in state funds appropriated to the project in 2023 has a sunset of June 30, 2027. According to District 1 staff, this timeframe does not provide sufficient opportunity to complete the next phases of a project for which RGC, MnDOT, and community stakeholders have spent years building consensus.

Our request: Please include the extension of availability of these dollars from June 30, 2027 to June 30, 2030 in the agency's recommendations for the 2027 legislative session.

Without this extension, we risk stalling the hard-fought progress we've made on the project so far and put the federal funds in jeopardy.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for MnDOT's continued partnership in advancing this important transportation project for the Iron Range. As a next step, we are requesting a meeting with you and relevant members of your staff to discuss Highway 169, this request, and our partnership to advance this important project for the Iron Range. Our government relations representatives at Flaherty & Hood will follow up with your staff to find a time to meet. We look forward to working with you to ensure that this critical corridor continues moving towards completion.

Sincerely,

Casey Venema

President, Range Gateway Coalition
Commissioner, Itasca County

Pete Hyduke

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Mayor, City of Hibbing

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