



May 11, 2026

Re: Support for U.S. Highway 169 Expansion from Taconite to Pengilly

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of the City of Grand Rapids, I'm writing to express my strong support for the expansion of U.S. Highway 169 from Taconite to Pengilly. This project carries forward a promise the State of Minnesota made decades ago: the four-lane expansion of U.S. Highway 169 between Grand Rapids and Virginia, the corridor now honored as the Senator David Tomassoni Memorial Highway. Only eight miles of two-lane roadway, between Taconite and Pengilly, now remain on the nearly 60-mile stretch.

This remaining eight-mile segment is dangerous. The crash rate is much higher than other comparable roadways, especially in winter driving conditions. Nearly every resident of the Iron Range knows someone who has been involved in a serious or fatal accident on Highway 169. An average of 6,000 vehicles—carrying families, workers, students, first responders, and tourists—travel these eight miles each day, and they deserve to do so safely.

Highway 169 is also a linchpin of the Iron Range economy. Key industries, including mining, manufacturing, forestry, healthcare, and tourism, rely on Highway 169 to move freight and connect workforce across the region. The remaining eight-mile stretch of two-lane roadway is not just a safety hazard but also causes frequent traffic congestion and delays that affect the whole corridor. Many oversized loads cannot travel the Taconite-to-Pengilly stretch at all; the heaviest trucks are forced on a 20-mile detour each way, which further increases transportation costs, emissions, and wear on local roads.

The Minnesota Legislature dedicated \$6 million dollars to the expansion of Highway 169 in 2023, and in 2024 the project received \$4.9 million in federally directed spending. This initial funding has supported project planning efforts; MnDOT and local stakeholders have devised a phased approach, beginning on the western side at Scenic Highway 7 and moving eastward. However, more funding is needed to complete planning, route selection, design, and environmental analysis. We ask for your support for additional appropriations that will help finally bring this project to shovel-readiness.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tasha Connelly, Mayor of Grand Rapids