

**REST AREA SPONSORSHIP  
FOCUS GROUPS**

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St. Paul, MN**

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**Project M-424**

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## BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND STUDY METHOD:

Mn/DOT (The Minnesota Department of Transportation) manages a statewide system of rest areas and travel information centers for the State of Minnesota. Mn/DOT is interested in exploring various innovative approaches to help the State of Minnesota fund the operation and maintenance of state-owned rest areas and travel information centers. One concept under consideration for some time is the development of a Rest Area Sponsorship Program whereby private entities could purchase sponsorships. In exchange, Mn/DOT would give sponsors some degree of exposure at Mn/DOT rest areas and travel information centers.

Mn/DOT staff identified several impediments to the development of a sponsorship program and was working to address these impediments when a severe state budget shortfall hit Minnesota in Fiscal Years 2003 and 2004. The shortfall forced state agencies to identify additional funding sources to accomplish their missions. At Mn/DOT, the shortfall escalated the urgency to find additional sources to fund rest area maintenance and operations, among other things. Since the concept of a sponsorship program was already under exploration, it was logical for Mn/DOT to study the concept in more detail. Mn/DOT's desire to explore and measure the marketability of a sponsorship program resulted in the selection of a market research program as a way to evaluate this concept.

Focus group discussions were selected as one of the means to accomplish the research goals. Focus groups are an exploratory research technique designed to elicit insights, attitudes and issues through moderated group discussions. While the **results are not statistically projectable to the population as a whole**, they can provide revealing feedback and directional data on complex topics and newly proposed ideas.

Three focus groups, in total, were conducted. One focus group was held in Moorhead on September 25 while the remaining two focus groups were held in the Twin Cities on September 30, 2003.

The participants in the focus groups represented a general cross section of the population – mix of age, income, employment and gender. In addition, each of the participants had to have visited a “roadside” rest area at least five times in the past two years. The participants were randomly recruited by telephone from the local areas and invited to come to central locations to discuss this topic.

Considering that participants recruited were heavy users of rest areas, it would be expected that they express strong feelings about these rest areas and possible changes to the program.

During each group, respondents were asked to help Mn/DOT better understand the public's view of the topic. The results of these group discussions will be used to help understand the degree of public support for the topic.

In cooperation with Mn/DOT's Market Research Office and MarketLine Research of Minneapolis, Cook Research & Consulting, Inc., was responsible for hosting the focus groups, group moderating and preparing the final report.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

### The Value Of Minnesota's Rest Areas

Citizens of the State of Minnesota who are frequent users of the State's roadside rest areas (five or more visits in the past two years) consider the rest areas to be an important State asset. *Participants in the three focus groups value the roadside rest areas on the State's highways and "feel good" knowing that there are ample rest areas available throughout the State. Rest areas provide not only a pleasant place to stop while traveling, but – even more importantly – they provide a place where travelers can safely stop and exit their vehicles.*

*Rest area users appreciate the rest areas as an amenity provided by the State while at the same time believing that this amenity has been provided for them by virtue of the State spending taxpayers' tax dollars to build and maintain the rest areas. As a result, it is somewhat difficult for rest area users to comprehend that part of this amenity could be taken away from them.*

*Rest areas are used for a variety of reasons:*

- *They provide a consistent place to stop that are "clean and well kept up,"*
- *They provide a "pristine" environment by featuring the natural beauty of the surrounding area,*
- *Especially during daylight hours, they provide a "safe" place for a solo female driver to stop,*
- *They are much more convenient than having to drive off the highway, plus, they are "consistently clean and well maintained,"*
- *The "setting is always pleasant, clean and picked up,"*
- *The restroom facilities are clean, unlike the dirty restrooms often encountered in service stations or restaurants at highway exits,*
- *They have restrooms that "are at least ten times cleaner than elsewhere,"*
- *They are more than a place to stop to use the facilities; they are also a place to meet different people from all over the U.S.,*

- *They provide a quiet place to stop and have a picnic with the family -- a respite from the “hustle and bustle” of stopping with the family at a restaurant/fast food place where “quality family time” is less available,*
- *They are always well lit, and several have an attendant on duty in the buildings during most hours,*
- *They provide a safe place for children to run and play – to stretch their legs after being “cooped up in a car for a long time,”*
- *They provide the person who is traveling with a pet (dog) a pleasant place to walk (and exercise) their pet.*

*Stopping “to use the restroom” is, not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned reason for stopping at the State’s rest areas. Rest area users consistently mention the cleanliness of the restrooms at rest areas and recognize that they are well stocked with supplies (unlike other places where they might stop to use a restroom). An additional feature of the restrooms that is well appreciated by the rest area users is the absence of offensive odors found so often in restrooms elsewhere.*

*Rest areas with well-maintained (and attractive) grounds along with well maintained buildings also provide a “positive” image of the State of Minnesota to travelers from other states or countries. In this way, the State’s rest areas become a visible asset for enhancing tourism for the State.*

*The focus group participants also mention that the rest areas in Minnesota are either the nicest they have encountered in their travels throughout the United States or among the nicest! A few rest areas from other states are mentioned as being at least equal in quality to those found in Minnesota – one on I-29 in Iowa is cited by one of the participants as being a “quality” facility while another person appreciates a newer rest area on a Florida interstate highway, and a third person mentions a rest area in Wisconsin that is scenic and pleasant. While there are occasional rest areas from other states mentioned as being “acceptable,” no state, except Minnesota, is cited as having consistently high quality facilities.*

Nearly all of the above comments about rest areas refer to experiences the users have had at Class I rest areas or at Travel Information Centers. A few of the comments also refer to experiences at selected Class II rest areas. *The focus group participants also acknowledge that there are other roadside rest areas they have noticed that are less complete; one participant refers to these rest areas as “less elaborate” than those on the major highways within the State.*

***It is important to note that most of the impressions regarding rest areas in Minnesota are based upon experiences with Class I or II rest areas or experiences with Travel Information Centers.***

After the participants have had an opportunity to discuss their knowledge of and experiences with Minnesota's rest areas, the participants are asked if they have "heard anything about the possibility that some of the rest areas may close due to the current financial situation in the State." Several mention that they do recall hearing or reading something about this possibility. Were this to happen – closure of some rest areas due to budgetary constraints, the participants believe that Mn/DOT should find the money in its budget to prevent this from happening. To the participants, the fact that taxpayers' money has been spent to build and maintain these facilities is reason enough to find the money to keep them open and operating.

### **Sponsorships As A Way Of Keeping Some Of The Rest Areas From Closing**

*Most rest area users are reluctant to accept a Rest Area Corporate Sponsorship Program. They would urge Mn/DOT to consider such a program only as a last resort and if the only other alternative was to close the rest areas. (There is one caveat, however. It is not clear if participants understood that sponsoring dollars would be put into the general program fund and used to keep Class III rest areas and Wayside rest areas open. Class I and II rest areas and the Travel Information Centers would not be targeted for closure as a way of saving funds, so sponsors' dollars would not need to be used to keep them open!)*

There is concern that a sponsorship program for selected rest areas would "open the door" to commercialization of the rest areas which is unwanted by the users and would be an unwelcome way to raise dollars. However, if money raised from sponsorships could keep some of the rest areas from closing, there are certain guidelines that the participants would want to have Mn/DOT follow:

- The sponsorship must not impair or interfere with the public purpose, use or function of the rest areas, and
- The estimated money collected from the sponsorship program must significantly exceed its cost of implementation – including signs, promotion and program management.

*There are several concerns expressed by the participants regarding the sponsorship concept. Rest area users would not want the sponsors to be able to interfere with the high maintenance standards and operation of the rest areas. The users want to believe that Mn/DOT's standards for maintenance and operation of the rest areas would not be compromised by the amount of money provided by the sponsors.*

In addition, the rest area users do not want, nor expect, to see the benefits to the sponsors as “blatantly” commercialized. They do not expect to see more than “minimal” recognition of the sponsors at the rest areas.

- Signage a mile or two prior to entering a rest area acknowledging the name of the sponsor seems appropriate; a sign along the entrance ramp may be acceptable as would a plaque of “modest size” posted inside or just outside the rest area’s building.
- A “Thank You For Stopping” sign acknowledging the sponsor placed along the rest area exit ramp might be acceptable, but it may also be entering the realm of “overkill!”
- A display of a sponsor’s products or services, if placed in a display case inside or outside a rest area building, may be acceptable if there is no obvious “sell” connected with the display.
- It would also be acceptable to allow the sponsor to post information about how a person could contact the sponsor to learn more about the products or services offered by the sponsor.
- The users caution, however, that too frequent mention of the sponsor could “backfire” into an “enough already” type of reaction.
- Decals acknowledging the sponsors posted on the buildings’ doors are generally disliked by the participants. Such recognition suggests “over-commercialization” and reminds some of the participants of decals found on C-Store doors, etc.

Including a logo on the signage along with the sponsor’s name is questioned by some of the participants. An example of a logo showing a cup of coffee along with the name of a coffee company might provide “mixed messages” for the users – seeing a logo of a cup of coffee may suggest that coffee would be available at the rest area, either for a charge or donated by the sponsor.

The rest area users would not want a sponsor’s products provided at a rest area, but motorists might be disappointed if they thought they were approaching a rest area where a sponsor’s coffee was available only to find no such product there. Such a sponsor could end up with “negative press” versus a positive image for supporting one of the rest areas.

*If sponsors are sought for selected rest areas in Minnesota, there are some considerations the participants urge the State to follow:*



- Rest area users believe that sponsorship contracts should be written with “great care” to protect these important State assets (the rest areas) from groups that “fall out of favor” with the general public due to economic or social impropriety. (Enron is cited as an example of this!)
- Rest area users believe sponsoring groups should be given the opportunity to sign for multiple years; contracts should be written for a specific period of time and contain an “escape clause” while allowing for maximum return for the State (sufficient time and money to set-up the program plus an appropriate return over time).
- The sponsors must be acceptable to a majority of the general public. Sponsorship opportunities should not be available to groups that a majority of the general public would find offensive: groups promoting or selling tobacco, alcohol or adult entertainment; political organizations or groups that promote a political and discriminatory agenda; groups that discriminate on race, sex or creed.

It is difficult for several of the participants to “grasp” the magnitude of the program and the dollars that would be needed to support the sponsorship program. Upon being asked what types of groups or organizations might be appropriate sponsors for this program, a few mention potential sponsors, such as local civic groups or churches, etc. Others recognize that significant dollars would be needed and mention large corporations. One participant suggests that an appropriate “tie-in” between sponsor and location might be appreciated. (For example, the John Deere Company might be a sponsor of a rural, farmland rest area where a miniaturized display of John Deere equipment could be set up in a display case.) Another person suggests an interactive display of products produced by a sponsor with a “hands-on” opportunity for children or adults.

**While several of the focus group participants mention that a sponsorship program is an “innovative way” of saving the State some money, they do not wholeheartedly embrace the concept. They would much prefer to have the State find the money to continue building and maintaining the rest areas as is done now – with State taxpayers’ money.**

*However, if the choice is between closing some of the rest areas or instituting a sponsorship program, the participants accept the sponsorship program as a much more acceptable alternative versus closing some rest areas.* One participant’s summary to the idea is, “I want the doors to stay open!”

## CONCLUSIONS

Minnesota citizens who are frequent users of the State's rest areas (five or more visits within the past two years) truly appreciate the presence of the rest areas. The rest areas are viewed as an amenity for the citizens of the State, provided by the State, although, paid for by taxpayers' money.

However, it appears as if the State has spent these taxpayer dollars wisely because the State's rest areas are widely regarded as either the best, or among the best, in the United States. Participants in the focus groups cannot help but think that Minnesota's rest areas must reflect favorably upon the State and help encourage tourism for the State. Many of the participants have traveled to other states and stopped at rest areas, few of which are comparable to those found in Minnesota.

Minnesota's rest areas are often referred to as an "important asset" to travelers. Not only are they attractive and well maintained, they also provide a place where travelers can pull off the highways into an area that is considered "safe" – particularly, safe for solo, female travelers who stop at a rest area during daylight hours. For most, the well-lit rest areas are acceptable for travelers stopping there at night as well.

Many stop at a rest area to use the restroom facilities. Minnesota's rest areas contain restrooms that are clean, well supplied and free of offensive odors. They are much preferred to the restrooms at service stations or restaurants found at highway exits. These facilities are often dirty, out of supplies and offensive smelling.

Others stop to picnic, let their children run and play or walk a pet. Still others stop to appreciate the beauty of nature that is often preserved at the State's rest areas.

When presented with the prospect of losing some of the rest areas due to the State's budgetary crisis, the participants find this an unacceptable action. After all, the taxpayers have already paid for building and maintaining the rest areas, so there is no acceptable option for closure. Most believe that it is imperative that Mn/DOT (and the State of Minnesota) find ways to "earmark" taxpayers' dollars to keep the rest areas open.

The alternative of rest area sponsorships was presented to the participants in the focus groups. For the most part, this is an acceptable alternative only if other means of keeping them open are not possible and the only alternative would be to close some of the rest areas versus keeping them open with sponsors' money.

There are concerns about sponsorships. Rest area users would not want the sponsors to have any influence about how the rest areas are maintained unless the standard for upkeep and maintenance

would be as thorough as Mn/DOT currently does. Further, the rest area users would find only minimal recognition of the sponsors as acceptable. Signage (a maximum of two signs) upon approaching and entering a rest area would be acceptable, and a plaque inside or outside the rest area building would be appropriate. A sign upon exiting the rest area would be acceptable to some, but it may also be approaching the point where there are too many ways that the sponsor has been recognized. Posting decals on the entrance doors to the rest area buildings is unacceptable, reminding some of the decals on doors at C-Stores, etc.

An additional way that sponsors could be recognized would be to allow the sponsor to post information about its products or services in a showcase, either inside or outside the rest area building. In some instances, the display could feature products or services that are unique to the area, or they could be interactive displays that might appeal to children or adults.

There is conjecture about what types of groups or organizations would be appropriate sponsors. Certainly, there are many that should not be allowed to sponsor a rest area: groups promoting or selling tobacco, alcohol or adult entertainment; political organizations or groups that promote a political and discriminatory agenda; groups that discriminate on race, sex or creed.

It is difficult for the focus group participants to identify appropriate sponsors; although, major corporations are groups that would likely have some interest in having their name connected to a rest area.

In summary, the participants opt for a sponsorship program only if this is the alternative to closing some of the State's rest areas.

## APPENDIX

**Mn/DOT Rest Area Sponsorship Study  
Focus Group Participant Screener**

**Focus Group Locations**

- Moorhead    Recruit 11 (one group only scheduled)  
Thursday, September 25 at 5:30 p.m.  
Courtyard by Marriott Moorhead Area Conference Center  
1080 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
Ph:    218.284.1000
- Minneapolis    2 groups scheduled (recruit 6 per group)  
Tuesday, September 30  
First group at 5:45 p.m.; Second group at 7:45 p.m.  
Cook Research  
6600 France Avenue South, Suite 214  
Edina, MN  
Ph:    952. 920.6251

**Participant Profile**

For each group, recruit a mix of males/females; different age groups and occupations.

**Screener**

**ASK TO SPEAK TO ADULT IN HOUSEHOLD**

Hello, my name is [YOUR NAME] from MarketLine Research. We are conducting a brief study on automobile travel and would like to include your opinions. We are not selling anything.

- Q1.    Are you at least 18 years of age?  
          Yes                                    [CONTINUE]  
          No                                    [IF “NO” ASK FOR SOMEONE IN HOUSEHOLD  
   WHO IS 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER]  
          Refused                            [THANK AND TERMINATE]
- Q2.    Before we begin, do you or does anyone in your household work for...?  
[READ LIST, PAUSING FOR EACH]  
          The Minnesota Department of Transportation                            [TERMINATE]  
          A city or county public works department                            [TERMINATE]  
          A newspaper, radio or TV station, or                            [TERMINATE]  
          A marketing research firm, advertising agency, or public relations firm    [TERMINATE]  
          None of the above                            [CONTINUE]
- Q3.    Do you, yourself, drive at all in your area?  
          Yes                                    [CONTINUE]  
          No                                    [THANK AND TERMINATE]  
          Refused                            [THANK AND TERMINATE]
- Q4.    Approximately how many miles do you travel in a typical week? This includes driving or riding as a passenger.  
[IF “DON’T KNOW”, ASK: Would you say less than 20 miles, or 20 miles or more?]

[RECORD RESPONSE IN MILES – IF LESS THAN 20 MILES THANK AND TERMINATE]

Q5a. During the past year, have you traveled by car or truck 100 miles or more from your home on a trip that was for either business or leisure purposes?

[CLARIFY: “BUSINESS” OR LEISURE”]

Business	[CONTINUE]
Leisure	[SKIP TO Q6.]
No	[THANK AND TERMINATE]

ASK Q5b. ONLY IF “BUSINESS” SELECTED IN Q5a.

Q5b. Are you a commercial driver?

Yes	[CONTINUE]
No	[CONTINUE]
Refused	[CONTINUE]

Q6. When traveling, have you stopped at any roadside rest area in the past two years or so? These are the rest areas for car and truck travelers along freeways and major state highways.

[IF NECESSARY, CLARIFY THAT IT CAN BE ANY STATE’S REST AREA]

Yes	[CONTINUE]
No	[TERMINATE]

Q7. Do you think you will stop again at any roadside rest area in the next two years?

Yes	[CONTINUE]
No	[TERMINATE]

Q8. In all the trips you’ve taken, approximately how many times have you stopped at roadside rest areas in the past two years? [DO NOT READ SELECT ONLY ONE]

[IF NECESSARY, CLARIFY THAT IT CAN BE A TOTAL OF ALL STATE’S REST AREAS]

One	1.	[THANK AND TERMINATE]
Two	2.	[THANK AND TERMINATE]
Three	3.	[THANK AND TERMINATE]
Four	3.	[THANK AND TERMINATE]
Five	4.	[CONTINUE]
More than 5	5.	[CONTINUE]

Q9. To make sure we talk with a variety of people, in which of the following ranges does your age fall into? Please stop me when I get to the right range. [READ LIST]

18 to 29	60 to 69
30 to 39	70 or more
40 to 49	[DO NOT READ] Refused
50 to 59	

Q10. What is your occupation? [DO NOT READ LIST]

- Professional
- Manager, official
- Administrative/clerical/technician
- Sales
- Skilled craftsman, foreman
- Operative, unskilled laborer
- Hospitality (hotel, restaurants)
- Service worker
- Farmer, farm manager, farm laborer
- Retired
- Military
- Unemployed
- Homemaker
- Student
- Other (CLARIFY FULLY)

Q11. When was the last time you participated in a focus group?

- Six months or less [THANK AND TERMINATE]
- Over six months ago [CONTINUE]
- Never [CONTINUE]

## INVITATION

### *Both Locations*

Q12. Based on your responses the Minnesota Department of Transportation would like to invite you to participate in a discussion group about rest areas. As a token of appreciation for your time and participation you will be paid \$50.

### *Moorhead*

Mn/DOT is interested in your thoughts and opinions about their rest areas. The discussion group will be held at the Courtyard by Marriott Moorhead Area Conference Center on Thursday, September 25 at 5:30 p.m.? The discussion will last up to two hours. Snacks and refreshments will be served. The \$50 will be given to you after the discussion is completed. Would you please be willing to participate?

- Yes [CONTINUE]
- No [THANK AND TERMINATE]

### *Minneapolis*

Mn/DOT is interested in your thoughts and opinions about their rest areas. The discussion group will be held at Cook Research's facility in Edina on Tuesday, September 30 at either 5:45 or 7:45 p.m. The discussion will last up to two hours. Snacks and refreshments will be served. The \$50 will be given to you after the discussion is completed. Would you please be willing to participate?

## CHECK QUOTAS FOR EACH SESSION

IF "YES", INTERVIEWER CLARIFY WHICH SESSION

- Yes, will attend the 5:45 session [CONTINUE]
- Yes, will attend the 7:45 session [CONTINUE]
- No [THANK AND TERMINATE]

### *Both Locations*

[IF NECESSARY, EXPLAIN: The group will consist of eight to ten people and a group facilitator who guides the discussion. Most people find these discussions quite interesting and enjoyable.]

Because we only invite a small number of people, your participation is very important to us. If for some reason a scheduling conflict should occur, please call our office as soon as possible, as we will need to replace you. Our telephone number is 1-888-989-4199.

We will send you a confirmation letter and map to the location. We'll also call before the discussion session just to confirm. The \$50 in cash will be given to you right after the discussion is completed.

I need your name and address for mailing the confirmation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

- Q13. RECORD GENDER  
    Female  
    Male



DISCUSSION GUIDE  
M-424

I. INTRODUCTION

- A) Moderator
- B) Focus Group Facility and Mirror (as Appropriate)
- C) Observers
- D) Microphones/Audio Taping
- E) Video Taping (Minneapolis Only)
- F) Notes from Observers
- G) Respondents
- H) Topic for Focus Group

II. USING MINNESOTA'S SAFETY REST AREAS

- A) How often, if ever, do you stop at and use a highway rest area in Minnesota?
  - 1) In the past year, at which Minnesota rest areas, if any, have you stopped?
    - a) IF NOT MENTIONED: Did you stop at any of the rest areas on the interstate highways in Minnesota (I-94, I-35, I-90)? Which ones?
      - 1. How would you describe the rest area(s) you used? How did it (they) look?
      - 2. What else?
    - b) IF NOT MENTIONED: Did you stop at any of the rest areas on the non-interstate highways in Minnesota (US 169, US 10, US 2 or Minnesota state highways)? Which ones?
      - 1. How would you describe the rest area(s) you used? How did it (they) look?
      - 2. What else?
  - 2) How do the rest areas that are found on Minnesota's interstate highways compare with the rest areas found on the non-interstate highways?
    - a) Are they similar? Are they different? Why do you say that?
    - b) Similar in what ways? Different in what ways? Why do you say that?
  - 3) What are your reasons for stopping at a rest area instead of someplace else, such as pulling off at the next exit and stopping there?
    - a) Is there anything, in particular, that you prefer about a rest area? What? Why?
    - b) IF A REST AREA STOP IS PREFERRED TO A STOP ELSEWHERE: What is it that makes a stop at a rest area preferred to a stop elsewhere? What else?
  - 4) Overall, how important are Minnesota's rest areas to you when you travel in-state? Why do you say that? What else?
- B) How well are the rest areas in Minnesota maintained or kept up?

- 1) Are the grounds well maintained? Litter cleaned up? Trash containers emptied frequently enough? Snow/ice removed promptly and well enough?
    - a) Why?
    - b) Why not?
  - 2) Are the buildings well maintained? Clean? Odor free?
    - a) Why?
    - b) Why not?
  - 3) What would you want to see changed about how the State's rest areas are maintained? Why?
- C) Have you ever noticed any differences between the rest areas on Minnesota highways and the rest areas on the highways of other states?
- 1) Different in what ways? In how they look? In what they offer?
  - 2) Are there any differences in how they are maintained or kept up? Why do you say that?
  - 3) What else?

### III. HOW MINNESOTA'S REST AREAS ARE BUILT AND SUPPORTED

- A) Mn/DOT is responsible for planning, designing, constructing and maintaining the state's highway rest areas.
- 1) Have you heard anything about the possibility that some of the rest areas may close due to the current financial situation in the State?
    - a) What, if anything, have you heard?
    - b) What else?
  - 2) What has been your reaction to the possibility of closing some of the rest areas on the highways?
    - a) Why do you say that?
    - b) What else?
    - c) How, if at all, do you think this would affect you? Why do you say that? What else?
- B) Let's talk about something that is under consideration by the State of Minnesota – a sponsorship program for some of the rest areas. This program is designed to offset some of the costs incurred to maintain the rest areas as well as to help improve the services provided at some of the rest areas.
- 1) DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF REST AREAS AND SHOW PICTURE BOARDS OF 3 SEPARATE REST AREAS.
    - a) A TIC (Travel Information Center): This is a recently remodeled rest area on I-94 as you enter Minnesota from Wisconsin; it is called the St. Croix River Crossing.
    - b) A Class 1 (on an interstate highway): This is an older, rural rest area located on I-90 near Jackson, Minnesota, between Fairmont and Worthington. It is not a Travel Information Center.

- c) A Class 1 (not on an interstate highway): This reconstructed rest area is on a non-interstate highway on the outskirts of the Twin Cities, between Minneapolis and St. Cloud. It also is not a Travel Information Center.
- 2) In a way, there is a type of sponsorship already being used by Mn/DOT – the “Adopt-a-Highway” and “Adopt-a-Rest Area” Programs.
    - a) Is anyone aware of these Programs?
    - b) What can you tell me about these Programs? What you know about these Programs?
  - 3) The current “Adopt-a-” Programs are designed to improve services and to reduce maintenance and operational costs incurred by Mn/DOT in terms of litter pickup only. Groups and organizations provide the people to pick-up litter on adopted highways and to pick-up litter and generally “police” adopted rest areas that are more like “pull-off areas” (small, non-interstate rest stops) versus the type of rest areas shown on the display boards. Mn/DOT pays for highway signs identifying highways or rest areas that are adopted for at least two years.
- C) In the case of a sponsoring program for the types of rest areas shown on the boards, here is some of what is being considered.
- 1) Mn/DOT would follow some guiding principles for the concept of rest area sponsorships with the goal of offsetting costs to help maintain rest areas.
    - a) The sponsorship must not impair or interfere with the public purpose, use or function of the rest areas.
    - b) The estimated money collected from the sponsorships must significantly exceed its cost of implementation, including signs, promotion and program management.
    - c) This cost offsetting approach must not be perceived negatively by the majority of the public.
  - 2) Considering these guiding principles for sponsorship, do these principles seem appropriate to guide Mn/DOT for this Program? Why do you say that?
    - a) What other things should Mn/DOT be considering as it designs this sponsorship program?
    - b) Are there some things that are important to you that should be included? What? Why do you say that? What else?
  - 4) Mn/DOT (or a group working in its behalf) would approach companies, groups and corporations and ask them if they would want to be a part of the Program – companies, groups and corporations that you would probably recognize.
- D) SHOW THE TYPES OF SIGNS THAT ARE BEING CONSIDERED. This is what you would see at a rest area that is being sponsored by a company, group or corporation. There are two or three ways that a company’s or group’s support could be displayed for the public to see. Unlike the “Adopt-a-Highway” Program, these companies, groups or corporations would not be maintaining the rest area nor would they be able to display any of their products or materials about the company or group at the rest area. Rather, they would be showing their interest in the rest area program through the financial support of a particular rest area.

#### IV. REACTIONS TO THE CONCEPT OF REST AREA SPONSORSHIPS

- A) Overall, what is your reaction to the idea of company, group or corporate sponsorship for some of the rest areas in the State of Minnesota?

- 1) Why do you say that?
  - 2) What else?
    - B) What advantages would there be for a company or group to sponsor a rest area?
      - 1) Why do you say that?
      - 2) What else?
    - C) Are there any disadvantages to a company or group that would sponsor a rest area?
      - 1) What would those be?
      - 2) Why do you say that?
    - D) Which companies, groups or corporations come to mind that you think would be interested in participating in this Program? Why do you say that?
      - 1) Which others?
      - 2) Why do you say that?
    - E) Let's go back to the signs for a few minutes. Think for a moment about the size of the signs and where the signs could be placed.
      - 1) Do these sizes seem appropriate for a sponsor?
        - a) Why?
        - b) Why not?
      - c) What sizes, if any, would be more appropriate? Why do you say that?
        - 2) What about the placement of the signs? Would these be appropriate?
          - a) Why do you say that?
          - b) Where else would it seem appropriate to place the signs? Why do you say that?
          - c) What about a "Thank You" sign at the exit? Why? Why not?
          - d) What about a plaque inside that would describe what the group, organization or company is or does? Any interest? Why? Why not?
      - F) Now, let's think again the groups or organizations who might sponsor the rest areas. Do you think that sponsoring a rest area would be an appropriate way for a company, group or corporation to show its support of Minnesota? Why? Why not?
        - 1) Should the sponsoring groups or organizations be based in Minnesota?
        - 2) Why do you say that? Why not groups or organizations from other states?
      - G) Are there some types of companies, groups or corporations that should not be allowed to join the sponsorship program? What? Why not? IF APPROPRIATE, ASK: How about the following – political parties or groups, alcohol manufacturers or distributors, tobacco manufacturers, bars or nightclubs, casinos?
        - 1) Why do you say that?
        - 2) What else?

- H) Are there some types of companies or groups that would make more logical sponsors of rest areas?  
What? Why? IF APPROPRIATE, ASK: How about the following – hotels/motels/B&Bs/resorts, family eating establishments (without a liquor license), service stations, retail stores, family attractions (such as, Valleyfair), events (such as, festivals, parades, concerts, circuses, cultural events)?
- 1) Why do you say that?
  - 2) What else?
- I) Do you think you would have any different impressions about a company or group that sponsored a rest area due to the sponsorship? Why do you say that? What else?
- J) Is there anything else I should know about your feelings with respect to Mn/DOT creating a program that would allow companies, groups or corporations to become sponsors of a rest area? What? Why do you say that?
- K) Many thanks for being a part of this discussion.

## **Mn/DOT Rest Area Classifications and Descriptions**

Over 20 million travelers stop at Minnesota Safety Rest Areas annually. The rest areas offer a wide range of services depending on the particular facility and upon its classification within Mn/DOT's Rest Area Program.

Rest areas are generally confined to high volume routes, primarily Interstate highways, National Highway System routes and Minnesota Interregional Corridors. A few popular summer travel routes are included in the service network.

*Classification being considered for sponsorship program*

### **Class I Rest Areas** (42 locations)

Typically, located on 15-30 acre sites. Buildings are clean, modern and feature:

- flush toilets;
- complete heating systems and sometimes air conditioning;
- drinking water;
- picnic facilities;
- lighted parking lots for cars, recreation vehicles and commercial trucks;
- site lighting;
- maps; vending machines and pay phones.

Frequently, they include pet exercise areas, scenic views, and interpretative information about significant historical, cultural, or natural sites related to its region.

### **Travel Information Centers** (11 locations)

Officially, these facilities are classified as Class I rest areas, however, they offer a staffed tourist information counter.

*Classifications below are NOT being considered for sponsorship program*

### **Class II Rest Areas** (22 locations)

Usually occupy sites of from 5-15 acres. Feature vault toilet facilities with separate facilities for men and women, water well, picnic facilities, paved parking lots, site lighting and other site amenities. Seasonally operated.

### **Class III Rest Areas** (13 locations)

Sites range in size from 1-5 acres. Feature unisex vault toilet facilities, picnic facilities, site lighting and other site amenities. Some have paved parking lots and water wells. Seasonally operated.

### **Waysides** (170+ locations)

Mn/DOT's most simple and diverse facilities with sites sized around 1-5 acres. They do not have toilet facilities, but typically offer scenic views, historical markers, interpretive information or other points of interest. Seasonally operated.