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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

State Auditor Otto Launches Infrastructure Stress Transparency Tool

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ST. PAUL (2/17/2016) – State Auditor Rebecca Otto today launched the State Auditor's Infrastructure Stress Transparency Tool.

The interactive tool, located on the Office of the State Auditor's website, gives users access to a series of comprehensive maps of civil infrastructure statewide. The maps will serve as a one-stop shop for civil infrastructure information.

“In order to plan effectively to meet our civil infrastructure needs over the next few decades, legislators, local leaders, the public and other stakeholders must be able to ‘see’ where we sit comprehensively today,” said Auditor Otto. “These infrastructure maps provide an easy-to-use tool that allows us to comprehensively see the age, location and state of our infrastructure. Better planning and maintenance over time will allow for better outcomes for our communities and help us avoid major service disruptions.”

The Infrastructure Stress Transparency Tool project is a partnership between the Office of the State Auditor, the University of Minnesota and other important stakeholders who saw the need for this project. The project was supported in the initial phase of development through a Serendipity Grant from the University of Minnesota. The grant, which provided funding for a graduate student to create the online database and maps, grew out of a partnership between University researchers and the State Auditor that originated at the Smart Cities and Infrastructure Convergence Colloquia hosted at the University in February 2015. Len Kne, associate director of U-Spatial at the University, provided the technical expertise to create the tool and brought invaluable energy to the project.

“As a public research institution, the University aims to match its areas of expertise and innovation to the needs and challenges facing our society,” said Carissa Slotterback, Ph.D., the University's director of Research Engagement. “This important infrastructure tool demonstrates how forming serendipitous collaborations across disciplines and sectors can help creative ideas translate into action for the public good.”

The maps visualize existing data including wastewater data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, drinking water data collected by the Minnesota Department of Health, and financial data on city water and sewer enterprise funds reported to the Office of the State Auditor.

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“I identified the need for this tool over the last several years from conversations I had with various government officials and members of the public. There was plenty of data out there in databases, but no one place to review or ‘see’ it,” Auditor Otto added. “If we do not understand where we sit today comprehensively as a state with our infrastructure, how can we successfully plan for the future? These maps will allow for much more informed decision-making and provide for better outcomes.”

During the tool’s development, State Auditor Otto and other project stakeholders travelled the state and allowed city officials to test the tool and provide comments. Input from mayors, city engineers, public works staff, and city finance directors helped refine the tool and the information it displays. The tool has received very positive feedback from city officials across Minnesota who previewed the tool.

Although the maps today are a great start, State Auditor Otto points out that this is only the beginning of this project. **“I want to include additional infrastructure data from Special Service Districts, counties and other local governments to the maps. I also want to add data for local streets and bridges in response to requests from city leaders around the state. Some cities have even expressed a desire to work on a pilot project to submit data specifically to be displayed on the map. My collaborators and I look at the tool today and see this as the first step.”**

Further development of the map will require additional funding. The State Auditor is currently exploring funding options.

The State Auditor’s Infrastructure Stress Transparency Tool can be found on the Office of the State Auditor website. It can be accessed directly at:

<http://www.auditor.state.mn.us/maps/>

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The Office of the State Auditor is a constitutional office that is charged with overseeing more than \$20 billion spent annually by local governments in Minnesota. The Office of the State Auditor does this by performing audits of local government financial statements, and by reviewing documents, data, reports, and complaints reported to the Office. The financial information collected from local governments is analyzed and is the basis of statutory reports issued by the Office of the State Auditor.

Rebecca Otto is Minnesota’s 18th State Auditor. A high-resolution official photo is available for download at http://www.auditor.state.mn.us/images/otto_hires.jpg. To learn more about State Auditor Otto, see <http://www.auditor.state.mn.us/default.aspx?page=bio>.