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HEADLINE: Now the hard part: Turning the meters back on

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BODY:

The experimental shutdown of ramp meters in the Twin Cities is nearly over, and officials are trying to figure out what to do next.

The study is set to run into December. The results are due to the Legislature Feb. 1. The final date will be decided within two weeks, the study's director said.

Once the study is over, officials are torn over whether to turn the meters on or leave them off while they analyze the data and report results to the Legislature.

Already, the chairman of the community advisory committee overseeing the study for the Transportation Department said the metering has been too aggressive.

"Without having seen the data, I believe the conclusion will be that we've had a little overkill here - maybe a lot of overkill - and that we shouldn't go back to where we were and we need to modify in some way," David Jennings said.

Jennings said turning all the meters back on now might feed public cynicism about the study. Jennings is also a former speaker of the Minnesota House.

"I believe if we turn them all back on as they were, we lose all credibility with the public, who long ago figured out that the way the meters were working ... they weren't contributing to reduced congestion," he said.

Leaving the meters off for months while the data is studied and the Legislature considers the results is also dangerous. Jennings said there is a chance drivers would ignore the meters if they came back on, ruining meters as a traffic management tool forever.

A third option is adjusting the meters now by turning some on and leaving others off.

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