

For immediate release

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Transit Supporters Herald Another Key Milestone  
for Saint Paul-to-Chicago High-Speed Rail Project

"Group unveils new coalition, calls on legislators to ensure project remains  
in state's proposed capital investment legislation"

SAINT PAUL - Calling it a critically important opportunity for Minnesota and the east metro area, a group of federal, state and local elected officials today joined business leaders and other transit advocates to celebrate progress on the proposed high-speed rail line between downtown Saint Paul and Chicago. They also called on lawmakers to make sure the project remains part of the bonding bill being considered by the Minnesota House of Representatives and Senate.

The progress announced by the group includes:

The formation of On Board Midwest, a grassroots coalition to advocate for federal funding for the rail line. Mayor Coleman joins leaders from around the region at On Board Midwest announcement that will bring new passenger rail service along with expanded Amtrak and freight service to Minnesota. On Board Midwest is made up of elected officials, businesses, individuals, and other transit advocates from Winona to Saint Paul who support coordinated regional transit investment.

o Ramsey County's purchase of the Union Depot head house in downtown Saint Paul. The head house is the entrance area of the structure that remains open today with restaurants and banquet facilities. The head house would also be an essential part of the Saint Paul-to-Chicago rail operation.

"Fifteen years of project planning, persistence and patience are starting to produce real results," Congresswoman Betty McCollum said. "President Obama's decision to include this project in his vision for rail in Minnesota gives us even more momentum to generate support. This project will put people to work and invest billions of dollars in Minnesota and strengthen our connection to the region."

"What was just a dream a few years ago is quickly becoming a reality," Mayor Chris Coleman said. "This project will connect Minnesota with new economic development opportunities across the Midwest. Our message today is that we are united, and we stand ready to seize the momentum President Obama has given this project. We are ready to get shovels in the ground. This is an opportunity that we cannot allow to pass us by."

"Our vision for the Union Depot is now one step closer to reality," State Senator Katie Sieben said. "This building will soon be the place where the I-94, Red Rock, Rush Line, Robert Street, and Central corridors connect with Amtrak and the new high-speed rail service. This vision is now moving toward a reality that benefits our entire community."

"While we have momentum and renewed interest in this project, we need lawmakers to fulfill their commitment and support the project," State Representative Alice Hausman said. "We urge Governor Pawlenty and the leadership in the House and Senate to make sure funding for this line remains in the bonding bill as we approach the final days of the legislative session."

The proposed 400-mile Saint Paul-to-Chicago rail line will be part of the Midwest Regional Rail System, an ongoing effort to develop an improved and expanded intercity passenger rail system

throughout the Midwest. The project would upgrade rail lines in existing transit corridors to make it possible for high-speed train traffic. The project would also enable Amtrak to expand its operations in the area and increase freight service for businesses in the region.

"This is more than just creating a new way to get to Chicago," said Dan Scott, chair of the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce's board of directors. "We have the opportunity to immediately create jobs through the work needed to enhance the line. In the long term, the rail line will spur business growth and give companies here more access to markets in the Midwest and the rest of the country."

"There is great interest from a number of cities to bring new rail projects to Minnesota, but the reality is this route will be the first to move forward," said Della Schmidt, president of the Winona Chamber of Commerce. "The route uses an existing rail line, takes advantage of the 15 years of planning, and is the only line ready to go. Winona supports this because we not only need new passengers, but the expanded freight service will help support existing businesses and make it possible for others to expand."

"High speed rail from Saint Paul to Chicago will be the first new rail project to get funded because it is the only project that is ready to go," said Michelle Jacobs, president of the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce. "The Hastings business community supports this project because we know it helps our region and will help our community advance plans for the Red Rock commuter rail in the future. Picking the right project to be first for our region is important. Saint Paul-to-Chicago has the strongest support and the benefit of 15 years of planning."

The Saint Paul-to Chicago line will enter Minnesota at La Crescent and travel north along the Mississippi River for 150 miles through Winona and Red Wing before reaching the Union Depot. The project will offer six new daily roundtrips to Chicago and create 1,570 permanent jobs, \$1.6 billion in user benefits, and up to \$180 million in joint economic development potential at stations.

For more information, visit [onboardmidwest.com](http://www.onboardmidwest.com) [ <http://www.onboardmidwest.com> ].