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U.S. DOT to Provide $156 Million in Federal Funding to Build Northstar Commuter Rail Connecting Minneapolis to Big Lake

Relief for commuters in Minnesota's booming Northstar Corridor is on the way, according to Admiral Thomas Barrett, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Transportation. Admiral Barrett today announced the signing of a Full Funding Grant Agreement that commits the Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to provide $156 million to build a commuter rail project from the town of Big Lake to downtown Minneapolis.

"We are delivering an investment that guarantees Northstar can move off the drawing board and onto the rails," Admiral Barrett said. "This agreement gives further momentum to Minneapolis's efforts to untangle traffic and create additional commuter options."

Admiral Barrett was joined by Governor Tim Pawlenty, members of the Minnesota congressional delegation, and local officials at a ceremony to sign the agreement to provide $156 million—roughly half of the project's $317 million total cost—to be paid out by the FTA through 2009.

The 40-mile commuter rail line will connect downtown Minneapolis' central business district to the town of Big Lake using the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe tracks. The project includes an extension of the existing Hiawatha Light Rail line to a new intermodal station at 5th Avenue North in downtown Minneapolis, which will allow Northstar riders to easily transfer to light rail and nearby bus service.

The project is considered the first phase of what may eventually be an 82-mile commuter rail line running the length of the Northstar Corridor from downtown Minneapolis to Rice, Minn. By 2025, more than 850,000 people are expected to be living in the corridor, an increase of about 200,000 people.

Admiral Barrett added, "After a difficult year, there's a new star rising on Minneapolis's transportation horizon and it's lighting a path to faster trips to the office, to the ball game and back home."

Funds will be used to purchase 22 commuter rail vehicles, two light-rail vehicles, fare collection equipment, and real estate, and to build five commuter rail stations with 1,900 park and ride spaces and a vehicle maintenance facility. The line will open in 2010 with 4,110 passengers a day and is expected to carry 5,900 passengers daily by 2030.

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