

**Written Testimony of Mayor Christopher B. Coleman**  
**House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Highways and Transit**  
**December 11, 2013**

Good Afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Norton, and members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for inviting me to testify today.

My name is Chris Coleman, and I am the Mayor of Saint Paul, Minnesota. It is a pleasure to participate in this important discussion and to join this esteemed panel. I've had the pleasure of working with many of my fellow panelists over the years, and each has done a tremendous job advancing our nation's transit infrastructure.

I want to take a moment to recognize my two friends from Minnesota who sit on the Subcommittee: Representative Tim Walz and Representative Rick Nolan. Each is a leader on transportation for their districts and for the state as a whole. I also want to thank my home Congresswoman, Betty McCollum, for her leadership on the Central Corridor and other important transportation investments in the East Metro region.

Transit investments like the New Starts program provide long-term economic impact and generate future economic returns to individual regions and the national economy. The impact of transit investments in Saint Paul is no different.

We are six months from opening day for the New Starts-funded Green Line, or Central Corridor, light rail service linking downtown Saint Paul with the University of Minnesota and downtown Minneapolis through some of the metropolitan regions most diverse and transit dependent communities. Already, we have seen more than \$1.2 billion worth of investment in new housing and employment opportunities within the 18 station areas along the 11-mile route.

- Over 7,500 housing units have been or will be built along the line, many of them financed to be affordable to students or lower income households. These are families who will be able to reduce what they are now spending on the two biggest items in every family budget—housing and transportation—investing what they will save in going to school, buying a home or starting a business.
- The demand for additional office space is being met by new construction and renovation of previously vacant buildings—some 820,000 square feet – bringing employment opportunities to the heart of the city which are readily accessible to those who live there.

- Small business owners, many of them recent immigrants, are renovating their buildings and expanding their shops and restaurants to respond to a growing market created by a projected 44,000 trips per day on the Green Line.
- Sixteen colleges, universities and hospitals within blocks of the Green Line have convened the Central Corridor Anchor Partnership and taken stock of the fact that, together, they employ 67,000 people and have recently undertaken more than 100 capital projects accounting for some \$5 billion in capital investment. They are now working together to determine how they can leverage their roles as employers, educators and purchasers of goods and services to strengthen the Green Line neighborhoods.
- Twelve of our local and national philanthropic partners have joined together in the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and expect to invest \$20 million over 10 years— in addition to their individual investments – in community development activities ranging from supporting the growth of small businesses to ensuring the continued availability of quality affordable housing.

I could go on, but time is short. Suffice it to say that none of this would have happened— certainly not over the past eight years—were it not for the nearly one-half billion dollar federal New Starts investment that made construction of the Green Line possible.

The last time there was a major transportation investment in this same corridor, it was the construction of I-94 which, while linking Saint Paul to Minneapolis with Chicago and points east, also sapped the economy of these same neighborhoods, leading to 40 years of disinvestment. Learning from that experience, the FTA and its New Starts program insist that we as cities and regions demonstrate how we are going to use the federal transit investment to enhance the lives of our residents, build stronger communities and create more competitive regional economies. Saint Paul and Minneapolis are demonstrating—even before the Green Line carries its first passenger—the value of the New Starts investment in our midst.

Our work, of course, is far from over. Planning is now underway for future New Starts applications to support transit connections from Saint Paul's Union Depot to western Wisconsin along the Gateway Corridor and to the airport/Mall of America in the Riverview Corridor. Just last week, the McKnight Foundation announced a major grant to the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce to build the capacity of the East Metro communities that will share these two new lines. The funds are to ensure we can do the same work we did along the Green Line to ensure that the transit investments are designed to strengthen the regional economy by linking people with employment and education opportunities throughout the region.

Commenting on the margin of my recent re-election, a local college professor said that I had benefitted from being mayor over the last eight years when the economy was doing so well.

Perhaps he meant to say that I have benefitted from being mayor of a city where all of our partners, including the FTA, have—in the face of a fragile economy—rolled up their sleeves and gotten to work on building the infrastructure of a strong city and region. And because they did, as the economic winds now begin to shift, our region is poised for extraordinary growth—growth that benefits all of our citizens.

As I alluded to at the beginning of my remarks, the New Starts program is a critical funding tool for projects across the country. Last month, I was elected President of the National League of Cities. NLC represents over 19,000 cities, towns and villages across the United States. For many of these communities—and their regions – transit investments are a key component of their future growth and economic success. Transit improves their mobility in the short-term and creates long-term economic benefits to their entire region

Americans of all ages are seeking walkable neighborhoods with easy access to reliable transit service. By 2030, the demand for living near transit is expected to grow to over 15 million households, more than double what it was in 2000. Transit helps regions respond to these trends and can provide a return many times greater than the cost of the investment.

There are a variety of ways in which transit contributes to a region's economic success:

- Transit gives employers access to a broader labor market. In an analysis of the transit projects contained within the Twin Cities' 2030 Regional Plan, researchers found that with the new lines, employers could recruit from an additional 500,000 potential workers who would have access to job sites within a 30-minute transit commute.
- Transit provides workers with improved access to jobs. An analysis of transit projects in engineering or under construction in 2010 found that if all of the projects are ultimately built, 3.5 million more jobs would be accessible by fixed-guideway transit.
- Transit improves resiliency during economic downturns. A report by the National Association of Realtors and the American Public Transportation Association found that property near high-frequency transit service retained more of its value during the recent recession than property further away. In the Twin Cities, property located in areas near the region's rail system performed 48 percent better than the region as a whole between 2006 and 2011.
- Transit increases regional productivity. When a strike shut down Los Angeles' transit system, highway congestion soared, showing that the availability of such options significantly reduces traffic congestion, which increases regional productivity and economic

output. Researchers analyzing the effects of the strike concluded that L.A.'s transit system increases productivity in the region by \$1.1 billion - \$1.6 billion per year.

- Transit is a catalyst for economic development. Since opening its first light rail line in 1996, Dallas has seen nearly \$8 billion in new development and millions more invested in renewal of existing properties near light rail stations. More than \$4 billion has been invested to date along the Cleveland Health Line BRT, including 7.9 million square feet of commercial development and 4,000 new residential units. In the Washington, DC area, property within one-half mile of Metrorail stations is worth 7-9 percent more than property farther away, and generates 28 percent of the region's property taxes even though it is only 4 percent of the land.

Saint Paul is not alone in recognizing the economic benefit of investing in transit. Regions across the country are planning, designing, and building light rail, bus rapid transit, streetcars, commuter rail, and subways. A recent analysis by the nonprofit organization Reconnecting America found 729 such projects being planned in 109 regions, both large and small. Building those projects will cost well over \$250 billion. If the New Starts program continues at its current size, it would take more than 80 years for all of these projects to be built – too long to wait.

Today, local communities are raising funds for transit and the transportation network of roads and bridges that connect them to each other and the larger region – often by taxing themselves. But few local communities have the capacity to bond or tax for the full cost of construction. Through the New Starts program, the federal government has proven to be an effective partner in expanding transit services and underwriting economic growth.

With a rigorous evaluation process and annual public reporting, the New Starts program is a model of transparency and accountability. Unfortunately, it has also been subject to severe budget cuts in recent years. If sequestration takes effect as scheduled, the New Starts program will be cut by 12.5 percent in 2014 compared to 2010. I urge this Subcommittee to work with your colleagues to provide additional dedicated funding for this vital program as a down payment on our economic future.

In closing, I want to again thank Chair Petri and Ranking Member Norton for the invitation to testify today, and for the chance to highlight the great work we're doing with New Starts funding in Saint Paul. As Mayor of Saint Paul - and President of the National League of Cities – I strongly urge for your continued support of this program, and I am happy to take any questions.

Thank you.