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For More Information Contact:

Bob Berg
Berg Muirhead & Associates
(313) 872-2202
bberg@bergmuirhead.com

US DOT Announces That It Will Evaluate Entire 9.3 Mile Woodward Avenue Corridor Line Proposal

Mayor Dave Bing and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced Monday that the federal government supports the Mayor's vision of creating a light rail system in Detroit.

Visiting the site of the proposed Woodward Avenue Corridor line, U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced during a press conference at the Detroit Institute of Arts that the entire 9.3 mile proposal will undergo an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

The expression of support coincided with the publication in the Federal Register of a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for a light rail line extending from downtown to Eight Mile Road. The City of Detroit will be the local project sponsor.

Earlier this year, Secretary LaHood awarded a \$25 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to help realize the goal of creating the Woodward Corridor light rail line.

"Secretary LaHood's presence here today underscores the Obama Administration's commitment to support Detroit's effort to bring light rail to Woodward Avenue," the Mayor said. "We appreciate the Administration's support and partnership in building a better Detroit."

LaHood was accompanied in his visit to Detroit by Administrator Peter Rogoff, head of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Also participating in the announcement were Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, Congressman John Conyers and Rip Rapson, President and CEO of the Kresge Foundation.

The Environmental Impact Statement is conducted to assure that a project meets Federal environmental requirements so Federal funds can be used in its construction. Initial estimates of

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costs of a Woodward Light Rail line from downtown to Eight Mile are approximately \$450-500 million, depending on final alignment, station locations and the number and the final cost of materials. The project will be funded using federal, state, local, and private funds.

Most of Woodward Avenue from downtown to Eight Mile is under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). MDOT will work with the City to integrate the light rail system into the existing infrastructure, making this a truly integrated multi-modal corridor.

Bing said the next step in the process will be the holding of two public meetings at the Considine Little Rock Family Life Center at 8904 Woodward Saturday Aug. 14 to present details of the project and to gather public comment. The meetings are a formal part of the Environmental Impact Statement process called public scoping meetings.

Rapson is part of a group of business and civic leaders known as M-1 RAIL who have raised private funds that will be used to help implement the initial phase of the Woodward Light Rail project.

Light rail on Woodward will be implemented as a single project built in two phases. While a final schedule has yet to be developed, construction is anticipated to begin in 2011 on the first phase with the full system up and operational by 2016. The two phases are:

Phase 1: Downtown Detroit to West Grand Boulevard

- This phase is approximately 3.4 miles and will be advanced as expeditiously as possible with the necessary federal approvals.

Phase 2: West Grand Boulevard to Eight Mile Road

- Utilizing the same vehicles and maintenance facility as Phase 1, this portion of the project will complete Detroit's initial light rail project and set the stage for future growth of the regional system.

Planning for a rapid transit system began in 2006 when the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) conducted an alternatives analysis study known as Detroit Transit Options for Growth Study (DTOGS). The study resulted in the selection of light rail service on Woodward from downtown to Eight Mile Road as the locally preferred alternative. Subsequently, the Woodward light rail alternative was incorporated into the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) regional Transportation Improvement Plan and Long Range Transportation Plan.

At the same time, a group of business and civic leaders (M-1 RAIL) was exploring how to bring light rail service to Woodward Avenue as the first phase of a regional transit system. The M-1 RAIL and DTOGS plans are now aligned as the Woodward Light Rail project.

Individuals seeking more information can go to the project website at www.woodwardlightrail.com.