



August 8, 2017

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE
Washington D.C. 20590

via electronic and postal delivery

Dear Madam Secretary,

We, the undersigned legislators of the Minnesota House of Representatives and the Minnesota Senate, want to stress the importance of funding the New Starts program and future Minnesota transit projects. Throughout the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, there is broad support from local communities, citizens and businesses for the investment in these projects.

Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the surrounding communities are growing, and the Minnesota State Legislature is committed to investing in a multi-modal transportation system that spurs economic growth and increases mobility. Building out a comprehensive transit system is an important part of these goals and both light rail (LRT) and bus rapid transit (BRT) will play an integral role. Our businesses and residents, many of them transit-dependent, are counting on the expansion of our transit system which is currently anchored by the Blue Line LRT (connecting downtown Minneapolis with the Mall of America in suburban Bloomington) and the Green Line LRT (connecting downtown Minneapolis with downtown St. Paul).

Both the Blue and Green light rail line have exceeded expectations in ridership, farebox recovery and corresponding economic development. There have been \$6.2 billion dollars of new development along both lines and millions more in anticipation of their expansion. This and the potential for future investment are two of the many reasons that there is such strong support among the business community and the surrounding communities for the robust expansion of our transit system. Of particular note, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, along with 44 of its affiliates, have written numerous letters of support to the legislators at the Capitol and local newspapers. A TwinWest Chamber survey found that 75 percent of respondents in the seven-county metro area support light rail and 79 percent of respondents support transit expansion in general.

Nearly one million more people are expected in the metro area by 2040 and transportation infrastructure must be invested in to accommodate that growth. Our current bus transit system is as much as 50 years old and does not have the capacity to support that future need. We firmly believe that we cannot pave our way out of the expected congestion and that rail transit is an essential part of the solution.

As you may know, the Southwest Light Rail Transit (SWLRT) project is the planned extension of the current Green line that runs between Minneapolis and St. Paul. This extension will run southwest from Minneapolis through the suburbs of St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka and Eden Prairie. The project has undergone two decades of discussion and planning, millions of dollars of local and state investment, thousands of hours in community input and generated countless letters of support from local elected officials, the business community and residents. The SWLRT project is the next crucial step in the future economic competitiveness of Minnesota's largest metropolitan area as well as the entire state.

In addition to the SWLRT project, we are quickly working to advance many Bus Rapid Transit projects including the Orange Line and the Gold Line which have been conceptualized and brought to this point through the utilization of strong data-driven practices. Combined with the Bottineau LRT project (the Blue Line extension) these important projects will spur economic growth and improve mobility throughout our region. Each of these projects mentioned are critical to the future economic success of our metropolitan region.

You have recently received a letter from a minority of legislators in the House and Senate. That letter is not an accurate portrayal of the support for the project by the local and state levels, the business community, and countless other stakeholders. With this in mind, we would like to dispel any notion that the Minnesota Legislature does not support this project. Support for this project is more accurately gauged by the letters you have received from the business community and local elected officials from communities along the line.

We, the undersigned, would like to add our voices of support. We respectfully ask that you encourage President Donald Trump and your Department to work with Congress to retain the Capital Investment Grant Program which is critical not only to LRT projects but to various Bus Rapid Transit projects currently being pursued in our region. Further, we urge you to approve the full funding grant agreements for the SWLRT and future Minnesota projects. We thank you for your review and consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Senator Ron Latz
District 46



Rep. Cheryl Youakim
District 46B



Senate Minority Leader Tom Bakk
District 3



House Minority Leader Melissa Hortman
District 36B



Senator Jim Carlson
District 51



Rep. Susan Allen
District 62B



Senator Bobby Joe Champion
District 59



Rep. Jon Applebaum
District 44B



Senator Greg Clausen
District 57



Rep. Jamie Becker-Finn
District 42B



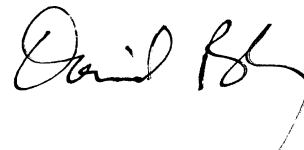
Senator Richard Cohen
District 64



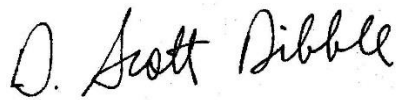
Rep. Connie Bernardy
District 41A



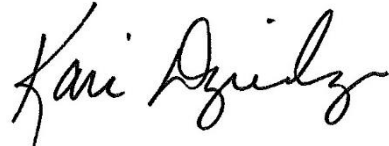
Senator Steve Cwodzinski
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Rep. David Bly
District 20B



Senator D. Scott Dibble
District 61



Senator Kari Dzedzic
District 60



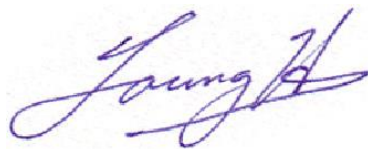
Senator Chris Eaton
District 40



Senator Melisa Franzen
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Senator Fong Hawj
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Senate Asst. Minority Leader Jeff Hayden
District 62



Rep. Andrew Carlson
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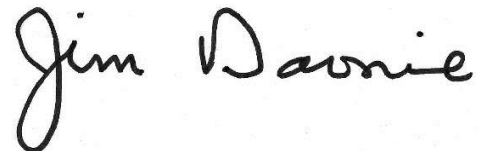
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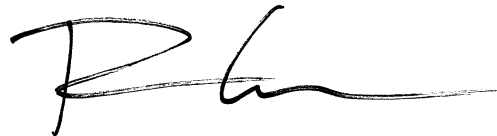
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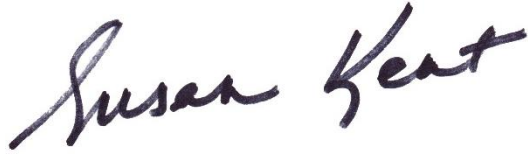
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Senate Asst. Minority Leader Susan Kent
District 53



Senator Matt Klein
District 52



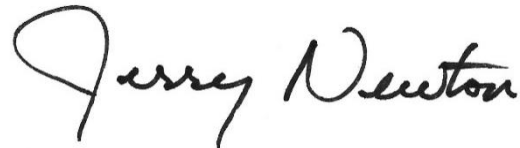
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Senator Sandra L. Pappas
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Senator Ann H. Rest
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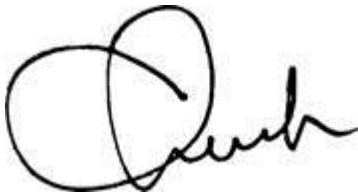
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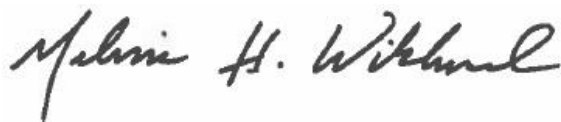
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Senator Patricia Torres Ray
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Senator Chuck Wiger
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Rep. Sheldon Johnson
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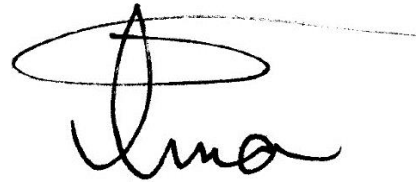
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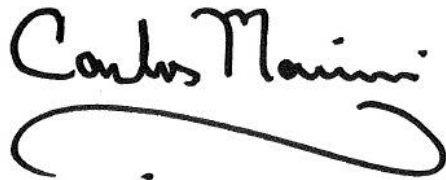
Rep. Michael Nelson
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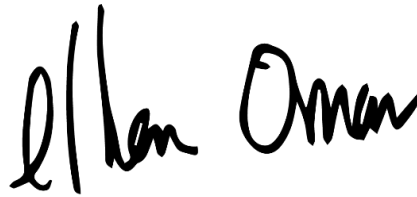
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Rep. Ilhan Omar
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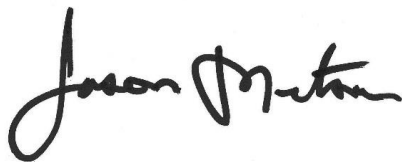
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Rep. Paul Rosenthal
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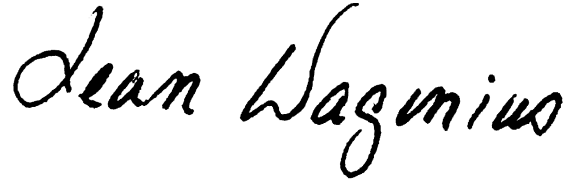
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Rep. JoAnn Ward
District 53A



Rep. Mike Sundin
District 11A

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The Honorable Senator Al Franken
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The Honorable Jason Lewis, Congressman from Minnesota's 2nd District
The Honorable Erik Paulsen, Congressman from Minnesota's 3rd District
The Honorable Betty McCollum, Congresswoman from Minnesota's 4th District
The Honorable Keith Ellison, Congressman from Minnesota's 5th District
The Honorable Tom Emmer, Congressman from Minnesota's 6th District
The Honorable Collin Peterson, Congressman from Minnesota's 7th District
The Honorable Rick Nolan, Congressman from Minnesota's 8th District
Senator Scott Newman, Chair of the Senate Transportation Finance & Policy Committee
Representative Paul Torkelson, Chair of the House Transportation Finance Committee
Alene Tchourumoff, Chair of the Metropolitan Council
Tonya Gross, Director of Governmental Affairs at the U.S. Department of Transportation
Doug Loon, President of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Charles Zelle, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Transportation
Abbey Bryduck, Director of Government Affairs, Association of General Contractors of MN
Deb McMillan, Director of Government Affairs at the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce
Peter McLaughlin, Hennepin County Commissioner, District 4
Judd Schetnan, Direct of Government Affairs, Metropolitan Council