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June 14, 2014: Grand opening for METRO Green Line

(St. Paul) - Light rail between Minneapolis and St. Paul will link Twin Cities residents to neighborhoods and the two downtowns starting Saturday, June 14, with free rides and day-long community celebrations, Metropolitan Council Chair Sue Haigh said today.

“Starting service 60 years to the month after the last streetcar left the Twin Cities is fitting.” said Haigh, whose work on the METRO Green Line (Central Corridor LRT) dates back to her days on the Ramsey County Board. “For me, seeing two vibrant downtowns, numerous job, education and medical centers, and, tens of thousands of people connected by this project is the most exciting part.”

The 11-mile corridor between the two downtowns links Union Depot in St. Paul’s Lowertown to the State Capitol complex, Midway, University of Minnesota and Target Field. As the region’s second light rail line, the METRO Green Line will connect to the Blue Line (Hiawatha) at Downtown East Station.

The mid-June opening will allow the line to serve baseball fans attending Major League Baseball’s All-Star Game at Target Field in July.

The opening is nearly six months earlier than required by the Federal Transit Administration, which is funding half the \$957 million project. The project is on budget.

The project created 5,445 construction jobs and \$252 million in construction payroll, with workers coming from more than 60 Minnesota counties ranging from the Canadian border to Iowa. The METRO Green Line also created 177 permanent operations and maintenance jobs for downtown St. Paul and has spurred more than \$1.7 billion in development along the line.

Event planning for opening day is underway, with the help of the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative, and involvement of the surrounding communities and businesses. Following a 9 a.m. speeches and ceremonial ribbon cutting at Union Depot, festivities and events for all ages are being planned from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, June 14, at Union Depot Station, Central Station, Western Avenue Station, Victoria Street Station, Hamline Avenue Station, Raymond Avenue Station, Stadium Village Station and West Bank Station. Metro Transit will offer free rides on the METRO Green Line and all other rail and bus routes June 14-15.

“The Central Corridor Funders Collaborative is a proud partner in planning and raising funds for the opening weekend,” said Polly Talen, program director for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and co-chair of the Funders Collaborative. “We want to celebrate the opening of the line and all the neighborhoods along the way. Our intention is to help make possible large, community-driven celebrations on opening day that will acknowledge the community contributions to this line.” Talen explained that station-area events will reflect the distinct flavor of the various neighborhoods and communities on the corridor and provide an opportunity for riders to experience what the communities have to offer.

Haigh thanked and acknowledged project partners, including the Federal Transit Administration and the Minnesota congressional delegation, Counties Transit Improvement Board, the State of Minnesota, Hennepin and Ramsey counties and the

cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. She noted that both cities went above and beyond in encouraging and creating vibrant neighborhood development with excellent bicycle and pedestrian access along the line. Haigh heaped significant praise on the businesses and institutions, and community organizations along the corridor.

“This transit investment is finally on the verge of paying off for so many business owners, customers, students and others along the corridor. I can’t thank them enough for their patience and guidance during construction. I am anxious for all of them to experience the vitality and renewal that has already begun along this light rail line and will continue far into the future,” Haigh said.

Project partners highlighted the significant impact opening the METRO Green Line will have on the entire region and the regional transit system.

Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, Chair of the Counties Transit Improvement Board and the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority noted, “The Green Line will re-twin the Twin Cities and move the regional transit system forward for everyone. This will become the impetus for investment in other lines critical to the east metro.”

“From early planning studies almost 30 years ago to this moment, Ramsey County has understood the imperative of a central transit line connecting our Capitol city with neighborhoods, major institutions and Minneapolis,” said Commissioner Rafael Ortega, Chair of the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority. “We made significant financial investment into the planning, development and construction of this line and eagerly await opening day to be celebrated at Union Depot, our historic multi-modal transit hub.”

Regional business leaders also praised the project, highlighting its role in economic development.

“Nine years ago, the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Chambers launched the Central Corridor Partnership to ensure that this line would be built on time and on budget. It is exciting to see both of those objectives realized in the emergence of the Green Line, a vital link in the transit infrastructure necessary to support a thriving region,” said Todd Klingel, president of the Minneapolis Regional Chamber.

“The opening of the Green Line opens a new chapter in the storied history of the Twin Cities. Connecting the two downtowns, through the heart of the urban core, this line will spur economic development and provide dependable, consistent transit options in the years to come,” said Matt Kramer, president of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce.

Updates to the June 14th celebration will be posted at www.metrotransit.org/greenline.

The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Council runs the regional bus and light rail system and Northstar commuter rail, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans regional parks and administers funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income families. The Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor.