

Good morning.

Since I took office many of you here today have joined me in envisioning a new future for Minnesota, a future that was spelled LRT.

In my first State of the State speech, I made light rail a cornerstone of my administration's multi-modal transportation strategy, and said I wanted to ride a train.

Highways, bus and rail help move Minnesota into the future. And, now the reality of light rail will make the Twin Cities region and the entire state of Minnesota more competitive in the 21st century.

This morning will be forever remembered in Minnesota history. This moment has been waiting to happen for more than 30 years.

The Hiawatha Light Rail Line is happening today because the public demanded more transportation choices. Because many people have worked hard and kept their sights focused.

Congratulations to everyone who has remained dedicated despite the roadblocks and bureaucratic games some people chose to play at public expense.

It is my honor to recognize those leaders, our partners, who have made light rail happen in Minnesota:

Congressman Martin Sabo, who believed in light rail and was instrumental in paving the way;
Representative Jim Oberstar and the rest of our congressional delegation;

The Federal Transit Administration, our funding partner

The regional rail authorities, led by Hennepin County and commissioner Peter McLaughlin and Joint Powers Board;

The Minnesota Legislature, especially state senator Carol Flynn, who chaired the Senate Transportation Committee

In my administration, the Dept. of Transportation and Commissioner El Tinklenberg, who will build a world class line and 17 stations on time and within budget;

The Metropolitan Council and Chair Ted Mondale and Council members, for planning the line and development around the stations with our government partners, local business and citizens along the corridor, and who will operate the line through Metro Transit

The Metropolitan Airports Commission and chair Charles Nichols;

The city of Minneapolis and Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton and Minneapolis City Council members;

And the city of Bloomington, former Mayor Coral Houle, Mayor Gene Winstead and Bloomington City Council members;

This groundbreaking today is happening for another reason.

The determination of citizens, like the Hiawatha Light Rail Community Advisory Committee, who truly understand what our future is all about.

I grew up in south Minneapolis and can tell you that light rail will help revitalize the neighborhoods. Our metro area needs choices like light rail if our economy is to remain strong.

What will make the Hiawatha Light Rail Line successful?

Open it for business!

I invite you to start making your way outside in the next few minutes, mark this historic moment, and join me in breaking ground for light rail in Minnesota!