

Thank you, Mayor Cardinal for the introduction. It's my pleasure to join with all of you today to recognize the progress we have made together--in making this state, the Twin Cities region and our communities one of the best places to live, work, raise a family and do business.

When I first appointed Ted Mondale as chair of the Metropolitan Council, it was clear that he and fellow Council members were about to take on a tough regional agenda. I'm proud to say that progress is being made on all fronts. The work you are doing is essential to support my administration's "Big Plan" for healthy, vital communities and improved service to the public.

Earlier this week, I took part in a "golden spike" ceremony to commemorate the laying of the track for Hiawatha light rail. That's progress--citizens will soon be able to make choices for commuting--by light rail, bus and roadways to the Mall of America, the international airport, downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota.

More affordable housing to support local business and our workforce are now in the marketplace because the Met Council played a key leadership role. By providing incentives and working with local government, business, community groups and citizens, more low and moderate income families have a decent place to live. That's progress.

Encouraging development--and redevelopment for our older communities--along transportation corridors and existing infrastructure so we can save tax dollars yet grow in the future. That's just common sense and the Met Council has been able to forge partnership--to leverage other public and private investment to revitalize neighborhoods and make communities more livable. That's progress.

For the coming year, the challenges we face are daunting. Not only are we a nation at war, our state--like others in the country--must confront the realities of revenue shortfalls, job layoffs and spirits that are dampened by the issues before us. But Minnesotans have a legendary resolve and I am confident we can join together to achieve more livable communities. That, indeed, is progress as we move forward in our tri-partisan model of government.

Thank you.