

LaHood praises Twin Cities' transport hub project

(The Associated Press circulated the following story by Amy Forliti on October 16, 2009.)

ST. PAUL, Minn. — U.S Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood praised the planned conversion of St. Paul's Union Depot into a transport hub toward a sustainable, car-free community, predicting Thursday that the project will ignite the city's economy.

LaHood did not, however, commit to federal funding for the conversion.

The \$237.5 million project to transform the Union Depot - the city's passenger train station for nearly five decades until it closed in 1971 - into a hub that will connect everything from high-speed and light rail, to buses and bicycles, will be an example for infrastructure redevelopment nationwide, he said after touring the building, part of which now houses restaurants, offices and condos.

"The days of just funding highways, doing all these things individually, really are gone. The idea of multimodal, the idea of bringing people together in what will become an economic engine for the Twin Cities, is really a new direction for the Department of Transportation," LaHood told reporters.

"There are very few places around the country that are doing this," he said. "It's what the people want."

Owners Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority expect Union Depot to have high speed rail capacity by 2012 and light rail transit by 2014.