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**Bus Route 288 to offer Express Service
Between Forest Lake and Minneapolis, beginning Jan. 7**

ST. PAUL, Dec. 20, 2007—New express bus service will be offered, beginning Monday, Jan. 7, between the new Forest Lake Transit Center and downtown Minneapolis, thanks to emergency transit funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Route 288, a one-year demonstration route, will provide relief at the crowded 95th Avenue park-and-ride in Blaine and is part of a larger transit response to mitigate the impacts of the I-35W bridge collapse.

The service is offered by the Metropolitan Council, using a contract provider, with planning assistance from Metro Transit and the Rush Line Corridor Task Force, a joint powers board of counties and cities along a corridor from St. Paul through Hinckley, Minnesota.

Studies by the Rush Line Corridor Task Force, along with a recent license plate survey at the crowded 95th Avenue park-and-ride, show significant park-and-ride usage by commuters from Forest Lake and the areas north and east of the city. Council and local officials say now's the time to test the viability of express service between Forest Lake's Transit Center and 300-plus space park-and-ride, and downtown Minneapolis.

"The demonstration route gives us an opportunity to address two regional mobility issues at once," said Council Chair Bell. "It'll help put additional transit service on the streets in the wake of the bridge collapse, and it'll help to determine the ridership demand and market for this service in the longer term."

"As Chair of the Rush Line Corridor Task Force I am pleased to see increased transit service in the east metro," said Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt. "And, with the help of the Legislature, we look forward to building on this beginning by offering service from North Branch to St. Paul, which will connect to Metropolitan Council service to Minneapolis at Forest Lake."

Five morning and five afternoon trips aboard coach buses will offer 30-minute frequency. The first morning and the last afternoon trip will operate only between Forest Lake and 95th Avenue. Those first and last trips will be timed to connect with Express Route 250 at the 95th Avenue park-and-ride for Minneapolis service. In addition, the buses will have the time-saving advantage of being able to use shoulders for the majority of the route.

The fare during the one-year demonstration period will be \$2.75. Route 288 customers benefit from the same fare cards and transfer policies as riders throughout the regional transit system.

“We wouldn’t have been ready for this service if it hadn’t been for the partnership between Washington County and the Rush Line Corridor Task Force to complete the Forest Lake Transit Center,” said Washington County Commissioner Dennis Hegberg.

“Support from U.S. Representatives Oberstar and Bachmann and State Senator Vandever was critical in securing funding for the Transit Center,” he said. “In addition, I believe the success of the Minneapolis service will speed up the introduction of more service by the Metropolitan Council, including routes to St. Paul.”

For route and schedule information call Metro Transit’s Transit Information Center at 612.373.3333.

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