

Rush Line Corridor Task Force
By Victoria Reinhardt

There is a monster looming on the horizon of Ramsey County's future. This monster is large, loud, spews toxic fumes and crawls along very slowly. This monster's name is traffic congestion. I love my car, we all do, but that love turns more sour every hour I spend in traffic trying to ignore the fact that it will only get worse in the future. There are many things we can do to help slay this beast, like car-pooling or telecommuting, but I want to take this opportunity to tell you about a new solution coming to the Twin Cities.

Commuter Rail, a technology that predates automobiles, has come back in a new, cleaner, quieter and more comfortable form. Commuter Rail is not Light Rail like the Hiawatha corridor in Minneapolis or Heavy Rail like the Subway in New York. Commuter Rail utilizes existing Freight Rail lines to move passengers. You may remember the demonstration of the Flex-liner that was held in St. Paul last year.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation is conducting a study of possible Commuter Rail corridors. After Phase I of that study, the St. Paul to Forest Lake corridor- which runs through portions of St. Paul, Maplewood, Little Canada, Vadnais Heights, City of White Bear Lake, and White Bear Township in Ramsey County - was one of the seven recommended for further study. Phase II of the report is due to the legislature in early 1999. Copies of the preliminary report are available from the Minnesota Department of Transportation at 296-1613.

In order to make sure that our local voices are heard we have formed a Task Force including Ramsey, Washington and Chisago counties. The task force is made up of local officials and citizens and is meant to provide a forum to address issues about the corridor. It should be noted that the corridor task force is focusing on a corridor that goes beyond Forest Lake up to Rush City and it is not limited to commuter rail, it is discussing all issues and options pertaining to transit and transportation. The name of the Task Force is the Rush Line Corridor Task Force.

The mission statement adopted by the task force at its' November 9, 1998 meeting is: To provide a community forum to address the technical, land use, environmental and financial issues associated with making reliable, convenient transit service available in the corridor. With that mission statement we identified four main goals for the task force:

1. 1. Establish an organizational structure that will meet the needs of Ramsey, Washington, and Chisago Counties and the townships and municipalities along the corridor from St. Paul to Rush City.
2. Provide input on transit decisions to county regional railroad authorities and the State and federal Governments.
3. Address transit issues, such as: interface between rail and trail; funding coordination for an integrated multi-modal transit system; advocacy positions to be taken; and feasibility of alternatives raised at the Corridor project meetings.
4. Address land use and related economic development issues, such as station/park and ride areas and preserving land for future transit uses.

The next meeting of the Rush Line Corridor Task Force is scheduled for February 8, 1999. For more information please contact me at 266-8363 or Victoria.Reinhardt@co.ramsey.mn.us.