## Federal Railroad Deputy Administrator Karen Hedlund Remarks

## National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) National Council of Representatives Meeting Hilton Milwaukee City Center Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 20, 2012

Thank you, Bob, for the warm welcome. Good afternoon, everyone. On behalf of President Obama and Secretary LaHood, I'm honored to join you.

I bring regards from Administrator Szabo. And to start off, I want to thank you all for your support.

The people in this room — and NARP members all over the country — are some of our most tireless advocates. All of you understand as well as anyone else the role rail played in powering the greatest economy the world has ever seen. And as we continue laying a foundation for high-speed and higher-performing intercity passenger rail, I thank you all for joining us in communicating the vital role rail must play in moving America forward.

In 2009, we envisioned a transportation network transformed by higher-performing and high-speed intercity passenger rail. And with the largest federal investment ever made in America's rail network — including more than \$12 billion for passenger rail projects — the FRA and 34 states have gone to work turning this vision into a reality.

We have now obligated 100 percent of our High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) program grants funded to us through the Recovery Act, and 99 percent of our program funding. As a result, nationwide, 154 projects are addressing all aspects of rail development — to laying and upgrading track, to eliminating bottlenecks, to station development, to planning for future construction.

In California, America's first 220 MPH high-speed rail system — a project that will create hundreds of thousands of jobs and provide a one-ticket ride between Los Angeles and San Francisco in less than 3 hours — is moving forward. And here in the Midwest, in just three years, the region has gone from having a vision, to having the fastest trains outside the Northeast Corridor.

And the reason our State partners here in the Midwest, and throughout the country, have started to lay the foundation for 21st century rail is simple: They know a 21st century economy won't run on last century transportation. They know that, by 2050, American will be home to an additional 100 million people, and that congestion today costs our economy close to \$130 billion a year. They also know that, given the pressure we're already placing on our highways and airports today – which, I'll add, are making significant cutbacks to short haul flights – we clearly can't afford *not* to invest in the most energy-efficient choice for intercity travel: Passenger rail.

The Midwest's vision is to connect this region's 40 largest cities with intercity passenger rail that delivers significantly faster trip times, more service, and superior on-time performance. That's 110 MPH trains providing direct connections to city centers, and seamless transfers to other modes of transportation. That's a third option for intercity travel that is competitive – if not superior – to highway and air travel.

Yesterday, this vision took an enormous leap forward. Administrator Szabo joined Secretary LaHood at events in Joliet and Normal, Illinois to celebrate the introduction of 110 MPH service, and to announce that passenger trains between Dwight and Pontiac on the Chicago-St. Louis corridor will reach speeds of 110 MPH in the coming weeks.

That's just the start. By 2015, 110 MPH service will be expanded throughout nearly 75 percent of the corridor. During this same time period, 110 MPH will be expanded throughout 80 percent of the Chicago-Detroit corridor, where higher-performing service was introduced earlier this year on an 80 mile stretch between Porter, Indiana and Kalamazoo, Michigan.

These improvements along Chicago-Detroit and Chicago-St. Louis will cut trip times on both of these corridors by close to an hour. Future improvements — those will significantly increase the number of daily roundtrips, and bring the trip time for both routes under 4 hours.

And as Indiana Gateway Project shows, we're just as focused on addressing areas prone to delays. This project is focused on 30 miles of track between the Indiana/Illinois state line and Porter, Indiana, where our investments have paid for track reconfigurations and upgrades that will go a long way in reducing delays.

Another priority for the Midwest – and indeed around the country – has been station development. Normal, Illinois' new station has improved connectivity – making it easier for travelers to transfer from a train to airports, buses, and car and biking sharing programs. But it's also proof that train stations are magnets for economic development.

The construction of Normal's station created good paying jobs over two years. And before it was even finished, the new station and the promise of 110 MPH service attracted more than \$200 million in private investments there.

Now, similar improvements are coming to Illinois stations in Springfield, Alton, Carlinville, Pontiac, and Dwight. In Michigan, they're coming to Dearborn, Troy, Battle Creek, and Ann Arbor.

And to prepare for the growing demand for passenger rail and for this new era of higher-performing service, we have also provided funding for Midwestern states to purchase 88 new, American-made passenger rail cars and 21 locomotives.

These cars and locomotives are certified to run at 125 MPH. And in addition to accelerating faster than today's locomotives, they're lighter, more energy-efficient, and cost less to operate.

Now, projects are not only moving forward across the country. Some are complete or nearing completion, reaching the finish line on time and on budget.

Earlier this month, Vermont celebrated the completion of a major rail corridor project. In just two years, workers upgraded 190 miles of track. They strengthened more than 50 bridges in addition to installing 140 miles of continuously welded rail, 130,000 new ties, and safety upgrades at 52 crossings.

The work done will deliver a 30-minute reduction in trip time off Amtrak's Vermonter service — and that trip time will soon be reflected in Amtrak's schedule.

And with the more-than \$300 million in federal investments targeted within New England, trip time reductions will continue all the way to New Haven, for a total of more than an hour in time savings. In Massachusetts, for example, a rail rehabilitation project will shave close to another half-hour off the Vermonter's trip time between the state border and Springfield.

Improving reliability and upgrading infrastructure throughout the Northeast Corridor — the nation's busiest rail line — has been a huge priority for us. As the region grows, so will the demand for rail. That's why we've invested more than \$3 billion in a variety of projects that are tapping into the roots of the network — eliminating bottlenecks, upgrading track, replacing catenary, and modernizing signals.

On one of the Northeast Corridor's most heavily used sections, federal funding will pay for improvements that will enable Amtrak's Acela to top speeds of 160 MPH. But the FRA is also aggressively preparing for the Northeast Corridor's future.

Right now we're engaging states and stakeholders in a planning and environmental review process that will help determine the future of intercity, commuter, and freight rail services between Washington, D.C. and Boston.

But we're engaged in similar planning efforts south of Washington, D.C. as well.

By the end of 2013, North Carolina and Virginia will have completed the required environmental and engineering work to pursue their shared vision for higher-performing intercity passenger rail service between Raleigh and D.C., a vision that will cut today's trip time by about 90 minutes.

We've also awarded funding to Georgia to plan for higher-performing intercity passenger rail service between Charlotte and Atlanta.

Between Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston, 150 MPH service is being studied, with three potential routes identified. And a corridor investment plan is being developed for

intercity passenger rail service connecting Oklahoma City down through Dallas/Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and through South Texas.

When we first got started partnering with states and investing in America's passenger rail network, there were skeptics.

Critics called what we were doing too expensive – too ambitious.

And there were some, frankly, who said America had too much of a car culture to embrace trains.

But Americans' real travel habits suggest otherwise.

According to the U.S. Public Interest Research Group and the Frontier Group, in the past eight years, Americans' vehicle-miles-traveled have dropped six percent.

But the report noted that travel habits are changing much faster among youth, who during this time have reduced vehicle miles traveled by 23 percent while *increasing* average passenger miles traveled by trains and buses by 40 percent.

The fact is, more people are choosing public transportation and passenger rail than ever before.

And I know all of you also heard the good news recently from Amtrak:

- 31.2 million passengers carried in Fiscal Year 2012
- 49% ridership growth since 2000
- And ridership records now set 9 out of the last 10 years

Ridership along the Chicago-St. Louis corridor increased 11 percent last year — and ridership has doubled over the past 10 years. Ridership between here and Chicago was up more two percent, while ridership between St. Louis and Kansas City was up more than 5 percent.

And as much progress as we've made transforming passenger rail in America – we're only getting started.

More than 6,000 miles of rail corridors are now being constructed or improved.

More than 40 train stations are being upgraded.

Thirty State Rail Plans and service development plans are now being developed — and we will continue to encourage strong state and regional planning.

So I thank you for your leadership – and again for your support.

Together, we can make sure our kids and grandkids will have a modern, multimodal transportation system.

Ultimately, our legacy will be more than trains and tracks and ties.

It will be a future in which businesses flourish - and a future in which America is poised to compete and win.

Thank you.