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Honorable Vern Ehlers Leads New Community Partnership for *Rapid* Transit *Initiative will raise awareness of Transit Master Plan 2030*

Grand Rapids, Michigan (April 13, 2011) – Former United States Congressman Vern Ehlers today announced a new community-based initiative to increase awareness of, and support for, *The Rapid's* Transit Master Plan 2030, which provides the framework for steadily expanding public transportation throughout the Grand Rapids metropolitan area during the next 20 years. The Ehlers Transit Partnership will be co-chaired by Jeanne Englehart, the immediate past president of the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce.

“Good public transportation is an incredibly important asset for our community’s future,” Dr. Ehlers said. “A convenient and efficient transit system will connect more people to job and education opportunities, help residents and families manage rising transportation costs and promote mobility and independence for citizens from all walks of life.”

The Rapid, the regional transit authority established in 2000, continues to experience unprecedented ridership growth. The TMP 2030, adopted by *The Rapid* Board of Directors in June 2010, responds to the rising customer demand for service. The plan, based on an extensive eight month process of public outreach, information and input, outlines strategies to achieve longer service hours, more frequent service, more convenient route connections and new transportation choices such as Bus Rapid Transit and Streetcar in the central city.

“We aspire to take *The Rapid* to the next level,” Jeanne Englehart said. “The system has achieved remarkable success in its first ten of years of service to our community. The TMP 2030 puts forward the compelling vision and common sense strategy to continue to build on that success and expand efficient and effective transit throughout the metropolitan area. The Ehlers Transit Partnership will help get this plan done and keep our community moving forward.”

Congressman Vern Ehlers served 18 years in the United States House of Representatives. During that time he distinguished himself as a respected statesman, a tireless public servant and a strong champion for numerous civic issues, including the expansion of modern public transportation. During his tenure, Congressman Ehlers helped secure more than \$100 million in federal funding to build up the Rapid transit system that today serves metropolitan Grand Rapids. More specifically, he helped secure funding to expand the bus fleet, build Rapid Central Station and relocate and build the proposed new Amtrak station.

The Ehlers Transit Partnership organized to help secure this legacy and continue the important work of expanding modern public transportation. The Partnership is a diverse network of business, educational and civic leaders. The partnership is comprised of 36 founding members, including such community leaders as Grand Action co-chair John Canepa, Founders Bank and Trust President Laurie Beard and Eastern Floral President Bing Goei. A full roster of Ehlers Transit Partnership members is attached.

The Partnership is organized around the shared understanding and steadfast belief that modern public transportation is essential to build healthy community. The effort is founded on a core set of values that include economic competitiveness, environmental stewardship and a low cost of living. A list of the Partnership's Guiding Principles is attached.

Members of the Partnership embrace and support the TMP 2030 recommendations. They will serve to share information about the plan and the growing strategic importance of modern public transit in the 21st century. They will also advise and guide *The Rapid* and the community through the plan's implementation.

"This is not just about building a transit system," Dr. Ehlers said. "This is about building a great community. And great communities have great transit systems.

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