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CENTRAL CORRIDOR “STOPS FOR US” COALITION RECEIVES NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AWARD.

The Central Corridor “Stops for Us” campaign is honored to announce that it is the winner of a National Achievements in Environmental Justice Award for 2010. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson made the announcement on December 15, 2010, at the first-ever White House Environmental Justice Forum, convened to highlight the Obama administration’s commitment to environmental justice and sustainable communities. The EPA’s award program is designed to bring attention to multi-stakeholder partnerships that successfully address significant environmental justice concerns.

The award recognizes the work of the “Stops for Us” coalition, which resulted in three “missing stations” being added to the eastern end of University Avenue and changes to federal policy. The coalition, representing a diverse group of neighborhoods, the religious community, housing, transit, environmental and labor organizations, used a range of tactics, including community organizing, to make sure voices of residents in the community were heard and involved in making sure elected officials understood the need to address environmental justice and racial equity issues.

With single-minded determination, the group worked for more than three years to ensure that the people who live and work in the Central Corridor Environmental Justice neighborhoods would have equal access to high quality transit and future development opportunities. Finally all the pieces fell into place in January 2010 when Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced that the federal Cost Effectiveness Index would no longer be a pass/fail gatekeeper for major transit projects seeking federal funding. This eliminated the last barrier, and made it possible to ensure that stops will be in place at Hamline Avenue, Victoria Street and Western Avenue when the light rail line opens for service in 2014.

This was a big victory for the Stops for Us coalition and for the Environmental Justice communities in the Twin Cities, and we are honored to be recognized with the EPA award. Our success provides a powerful example of what can be accomplished by a broad coalition that remains strong and focused for as long as it takes.

But several other Environmental Justice issues remain unresolved. For the Central Corridor line, we still have work to do to help small businesses survive, preserve an adequate supply of affordable housing, and enable low- and fixed-income residents to stay in place. And as planning moves forward for other transit lines, with new challenges emerging for Environmental Justice communities, hopefully they can benefit from lessons learned in organizing and advocating for the three stations. Most importantly, residents and community organizations must remain vigilant to make sure that future transit lines benefit everyone and assure racial equity.

The Stops for Us coalition plans to share our campaign story with other environmental justice communities in our region and throughout the United States. We would like the recognition that the EPA award brings to inspire others to persevere in addressing environmental justice concerns in their communities.

In the coming weeks, the Stops for Us coalition will be working with the Environmental Protection Agency and other community and local government partners to plan a formal award ceremony in the Twin Cities in 2011. We look forward to celebrating and acknowledging everyone who played a role in the success of the Stops for Us campaign.

For more information about the Stops for Us campaign, links to web sites of coalition partners and the Environmental Protection Agency's Awards Program, please go to: www.dcc-stpaul-mpls.org.

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