The Counties Transit Improvement Board's annual grant awards signaled its commitment to advancing transit projects across the region. The board authorized funding 60 percent of the preliminary engineering costs of Southwest Light Rail Transit; awarded its first grant to Bottineau Transitway; and invested in safety improvements on Northstar Commuter Rail.

In addition, the board continued its investment in Interstate 35-W Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), transit improvements in Washington County and operating assistance to Metro Transit for expansion of transit in the region. To date, the Counties Transit Improvement Board has invested nearly half a billion dollars throughout the last 4.75 years.

"Our eyes are on the next generation of projects – Southwest, Bottineau, Gateway – that will advance the regional network and further the development of our communities" said Counties Transit Improvement Board Chair Peter McLaughlin.

"We need only look at the terrific, ongoing performance of Hiawatha LRT, and its success in leveraging private investment to know that we are doing the right thing for our region by funding these projects."

The preliminary engineering commitment to Southwest LRT (not to exceed $55.8 million) signals the board's ongoing support of the project as the region prepares to request matching state funds from the Minnesota Legislature in 2013. Overall, the board will support 30 percent of the total project costs, including providing early funding for construction of the line.

A total of $30 million was distributed in capital and operating grants for 2013:

• • Bottineau Transitway, $2.4 million for early preliminary engineering activities once the locally preferred alternative route and mode are adopted into the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Policy Plan.

• • Anoka Station, Northstar Commuter Rail, $2 million for construction of a pedestrian overpass and parking facility to improve safety in the area. Construction will begin in 2013 and is scheduled for completion in 2014.

• • I-35W South BRT, $840,000 for purchase of five coach buses to operate expanded bus service between Lakeville and downtown Minneapolis. Ridership has nearly tripled since 2009 and is expected to grow in 2013.

• • Washington County, $2.9 million for guaranteed grant funds that are being deferred until the money can be used in advanced planning stages of the Gateway, Red Rock, Rush Line and Highway 36 corridors.

• • Metropolitan Council, $21.3 million for operating grants for the Hiawatha LRT, Northstar Commuter Rail, I-35W South BRT and Cedar Avenue BRT.

Throughout its history, the Counties Transit Improvement Board has been willing to take the necessary steps to ensure funding is available to transit projects throughout the metropolitan area. The attached chart shows how the board has distributed $494 million in grants since 2008, and the attached map shows the board's vision for the region.

The board accomplishes its work through close collaboration with its partners, particularly the Metropolitan Council. Every grant award has been made through unanimous decisions of the Board, reflecting the regional consensus behind making investments in a network of interconnected light rail, commuter rail and bus rapid transit lines.