



Speech by Rip Rapson:

## **The Present and Future Case for Light Rail in Detroit**

*At Jan. 18, 2013, event marking the U.S. Department of Transportation's award of more than \$25 million toward M-1 Rail, Rapson paints a shared vision.*

January 18, 2013

The private, public and philanthropic consortium we put together for the [M-1 Rail](#) project is extraordinarily broad and deep.

But before I comment on the project, let me triple down on U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood's recognition of [Roger Penske](#). Roger's principled, inspiring and disciplined leadership has helped us navigate scenarios of unimaginable complexity and decision points of profound importance. For this work, and for so many other contributions, Roger is one of the greatest of this city's treasures.

I would also like [Dan Gilbert](#) to stand. Dan and [Matt Cullen](#) have deservedly been recognized by the other speakers. But Dan hasn't yet stood up. He needs to. Dan's tenacious commitment to providing a 21st-century transportation system to help anchor the revitalization of the central business district has been formative to M-1 Rail.

And a final name needs to be singled out. When, one year ago, Secretary LaHood and the Federal Transit Administration's Peter Rogoff identified the 90 questions they needed M-1 to answer before we moved forward, it was [Laura Trudeau](#), who directs Kresge's [Detroit Program](#), who stepped forward to raise additional money, manage communications and navigate the politics. So many members of the consortium chipped in to make all the pieces fit. But day in and day out, there was nobody more instrumental to getting the job done at the highest level of professionalism than Laura. Thank you.

All the speakers have said in one way or another why the rail line is so important. Let me add just a few

punctuation points.

First, and most practically, the funding raised for M-1 will serve as a future match in federal funding that can be applied to the regionwide, world-class rapid transit system we all envision for southeastern Michigan.

Second, it will create new connections for residents, workers and visitors up and down Woodward Avenue, the region's commercial, cultural, medical and educational spinal cord.

Using M-1 Rail, nurses who live downtown will be able to ride to work at [Henry Ford Hospital](#). [Quicken Loan](#) employees can spend a lunch hour at the [Detroit Institute of Arts](#) or the [Charles H. Wright Museum](#). Residents of the North End, many of whom don't have cars, will be able to travel easily to jobs downtown. And over time, as the line connects into other spokes of the regional system, it will enable city residents to connect to the employment centers to the west and north and the residents of suburban communities to connect to all that Detroit has to offer.

Third, the rail line is important because the project is part of an arc of new civic aspiration in Detroit. It signals to city residents, suburban neighbors, the federal government and investors that Detroit is committed to 21st-century transportation and to a revitalized, re-imagined city.

As the visionary efforts of Dan Gilbert and Matt Cullen, the [Illitch family](#), [Peter Karmanos](#) and others take root downtown, we are seeing a renaissance in street life, business formation, residential resettlement and other elements of vital urban life missing from the core city for decades. So too in Midtown, with the extraordinary commitments of the Henry Ford Health System, the [Detroit Medical Center](#), Sue Mosey at [Midtown Detroit Inc.](#), our cultural institutions and many others.

M-1 will add weight to and accelerate these efforts, adding to the density of land use and foot traffic along Woodward and creating a more connected, vibrant, walkable city. A city that will attract thousands of new downtown and Midtown residents, hundreds of new storefronts, thousands of jobs, and model the kind of density that we aspire to in other parts of the city.

We've seen this kind of transportation system transform city after city in the United States. Think Portland, Denver and Houston. There is no reason in the world that Detroit cannot use its light-rail system as the very same kind of accelerator for future prosperity, future transit options and accelerated investments and

development.

This rail line is a bold move for a city that calls itself the Motor City. But it has already demonstrated that it can embrace and elevate a propelling, vitalizing energy that embraces anyone with a passion for the future of the city. It embodies the kind of commitment to change that we saw articulated in the announcement last week of the [Detroit Future City](#) framework. It signals to all those who will listen that we are ready to reclaim our rightful place on the stage of great American cities.

Thank you to all of you who have helped make that happen.

Secretary LaHood, we all know this is your 13th visit to Detroit. Thank you for not stopping at visit No. 12. You have been an excruciatingly tough, unerringly fair and unfailingly passionate taskmaster. We are the stronger for your leadership. And we won't disappoint you.

Thank you.