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Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program **Press Conference Transcript – October 28, 2010**

Tom Kane: Good morning, I am Tom Kane, the Executive Director of the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO. It is my privilege to moderate this briefing on an event whereby this metropolitan area, this region has received a \$2 million Housing & Urban Development grant. With me on the agenda today are Angela Connolly, Polk County Supervisor and chair of the group that is going to work on implementing the grant. She is our past chair at the MPO. She also chairs the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority. Next to her, Martha Willits, president and CEO of this organization that is hosting us this morning, the Greater Des Moines Partnership, will have comments. On behalf of Senator Tom Harkin is the individual Richard Bender, whose name is synonymous with being supportive of things that we are doing here in central Iowa, particularly when it comes to investments. Last but not least, Congressman Leonard Boswell, from the third district. We have been running into Mr. Boswell a lot in the last ten days, but it is all good news, it is all good news. And, Mr. Boswell will have the closing comments.

I am just going to say a few words very briefly because I think what has happened or transpired over the last few months is what has kept me in this business for 32 years. In April of this year, Bethany Wilcoxon of our staff came to me and said we need to talk about sustainability, there is some new grant program coming out under Housing and Urban Development, Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. DOT. On May 13th, Bethany introduced me to Aaron Todd of the Rebuild Iowa Office. Those two individuals sat in my office and said, “Mr. Kane, we think this is important, would you be willing to go to the MPO to do this?” On May 20th, just a week later, the MPO staff introduced the sustainability grant idea to the MPO. The MPO did not object overtly. Over the same time period, we had been talking to the City of Des Moines staff, Larry Hulse in particular, about collaborating on transportation corridors, land use scenarios, the future of our region. Over the summer, Martha Willits, Jay Byers, and I, and Dylan Mullenix of our staff, sat down and thought about how we might cooperate on the Capitol Crossroads vision plan that this group is working on, and that is all I will say, I will save that for Martha. We think the timing of all this came together rather well. On August 19th, the MPO voted to be the lead agency for this application – very unusual for us, as Chair Ted Ohmart would tell you. We did take that action in August; the staff worked over the weekend to finalize, in cooperation with the other members of the consortium, the submission of grant for \$3.1 million, a \$2 million request, \$1.1 million matching funds from the entities here. I told Jay that I do want to recognize Bethany Wilcoxon, Dylan Mullenix, who is not able to be here today, Stephanie Ripperger is working with the numbers, the money, and, last but not least from our group, I left out Adam Noelting who is here with us this morning, but Jonathan Wilson, with the Davis Brown firm who serves as our General Counsel.

We got word, Bethany came to me and said HUD wants more information, this was in September. Then, on October 14th, we were given word that we had received the \$2 million. With that, I am going to close with why I think we are all here today. I am going to read you a quote that my wife gave me back in 1977 when I was a post-graduate student at the University of Georgia. “Thinkers think and doers do. But until the doers think and the thinkers do, progress will be just another word in the already overburdened vocabulary of talkers who talk.” To my right are the doers. Around this room are the doers. We are here today to celebrate and to announce what we are going to be working on for the next few months. With that, I am going to bring forward Angela Connolly, representing the MPO this morning. Thank you.

Angela Connolly: Thanks, Tom. I was just at a podium a week or so ago announcing something else that these fine gentlemen brought to us. I cannot begin to express how pleased that we are to have been provided this \$2 million from

HUD for the first really of its kind, the sustainability grant. Our gratitude goes out to Senator Harkin and Congressman Boswell for everything that they do for us in this region. I know Richard will relay that to our Senator. I know Richard was an integral part of this. We met him on a Saturday morning and really outlined everything about this grant. He listened and was very thoughtful, so we really you taking out the time to do that.

Our committee, which includes a wide range of participants, will allow us to move forward with the next step in developing this plan. The collaboration has really stepped up to the plate through partnerships with various communities and organizations, and it is very gratifying to know that the hard work of our staff and the commitment of the committee that put this together, our grant has really come to fruition. I know that they did not sleep much trying to get this grant done, so we really appreciate their time.

The grant will enable us to provide a comprehensive framework for future development of the region and give us a model to understand long-term planning on various issues. This multi-jurisdictional planning effort will incorporate housing, land use, economic development, environment, transportation, and infrastructure. Through the preparation of this plan, these grant dollars we have received will provide additional opportunities for the funding of other elements within the plan once it is developed. And if done right – believe me, it will be done right – this plan serves to change the face of our region, and we will all be proud to say that we were part of it. With that, I thank you very much.

Tom Kane: Thank you, Angela. Before I proceed, Bethany, did I leave out Aaron Todd, at RIO? I had promised – The other half of the dynamic duo that came to meet with me in April that started some of the chain of events. With that, I want to make sure Aaron's name gets mentioned. With that, I would like to bring up Martha to share her comments.

Martha Willits: Thank you, Tom, Congressman, and other friends here today, thank you for joining us this morning. I think it should be said that there is a record being set today; I do not know that I have locally seen us come together so quickly and so palatably to take advantage of this opportunity. Of course, our Congressional delegation always responds well to us, but they responded really quickly and well on this, so I want to thank Congressman Boswell for being here and Richard Bender for Senator Harkin. Also, I want to thank Senator Grassley and Congressman Latham who were not able to be here this morning but also responded and sent it support on this grant.

A quick response means I think we have success ahead of us on this. Most of us in the room have been around the block in this kinds of things a lot of years. We know we do things well together, but this was really quick – Ted Ohmart can attest to that, and it is great to have Brad Golightly from Dallas County in here this morning. This can attest to the fact that we can come together, look ahead, and think about something we have not done before in this kind of way and really make it work. We are excited. The Partnership, I know, is able to stand and thank all of you public partners, both local and those from Washington that joined us today, in making this happen. We know as well as anyone that the public-private partnerships in the community are really strong and really successful, and also good risk-takers, really willing to look ahead and try new things, so this is a great example of that ability to look ahead and try new things. The Partnership, as has been mentioned, is joining several other partners in going through about a nine month visioning process in this community. That visioning process becomes a component of this, laying out the vision of all of this tool. We are happy to play that role and provide that kind of framework for the work ahead that we can do together. I think that will be an exciting piece of work. Tom mentioned that this is kind of a capstone of his long, illustrious career; I think that says a lot. You have seen a lot, you have seen everything, and this is a nice high point to think about as you really round out this great career. I will not steal Rich Bender's speech, but he did sort of whisper something in my ear about really smart decision-making, so I know he will talk about that. Great to have you here, Congressman, and Rich Bender, and thank you so much for your work.

Richard Bender: Thank you. This is really a... It is not a huge sum of money, frankly, \$2 million, more in the local match, but I think it really is crucial. You talk about a visioning process and putting people together, getting people to talk to each other – that really is very, very important. Sometimes just working out a grant proposal is very helpful in getting people together to think. Actually getting the dough is more useful still, and I think, with this grant, there are two levels. One, you have real cooperation – the Greater Des Moines Partnership, Des Moines, West Des Moines, Urbandale, Ankeny, all the cities, Polk County – come together, and they really work together at trying to figure out how it is that they can plan in an integrated fashion as a metropolitan area. That is really important, and having that planning actually occur in the long-term is even more important. Rational planning, trying to get transportation and housing and environmental concerns all working together rather than the usual method, which is each one separately decided upon without looking at how it all fits is the usual way. We have to do better than that; that brings a

metropolitan area forward. I want to thank Angela Connolly and Frank Cownie, who were willing to meet with me on a Saturday morning and really sold me on this grant. I know a lot of us worked to try to get it to move forward. I know Congressman Boswell worked hard with HUD to get it to move forward, and I am very happy that those efforts were successful. I think it really will do a lot, not that you will have this set of reports but that you will have this situation where there really is figuring out what the area needs as a whole, and that will help do more to bring the area together. Thank you.

Tom Kane: Thank you, Richard. It is my pleasure and privilege to introduce Congressman Leonard Boswell for his remarks. Congressman.

Congressman Leonard Boswell: This is kind of fun to have these kind of meetings once in awhile. I look out there and see a few other people with big smiles on their faces. I just want to start off to say that, in our family, not so much that I do, I do not have the patience maybe, but there are a lot of puzzles when the family gets together, they like to put puzzles together. You get better at it, and they get more complicated. It takes effort, and then contests get started and so on. But, you bring all the pieces together, it looks pretty nice, pretty attractive. Angela and Martha, thank you for your leadership. My gosh, this is really bringing the pieces together. Jay and all the rest of you, Ted, around the room, all of you... This is really something.

When you all come in for the Partnership trip and think nobody notices, the buses roll up to the hotel and we are there to greet you when you come in, you know, there are a lot of other things going on in that hotel. You would be amazed at the number of people that come and say something – what an effort, the uplift, its all these entities working together and so on, and it makes quite an impression. It makes it easier for Rich or Senator Harkin or myself to bring people out here, and we have had some pretty significant people come into our city, our metropolitan area, and our state – that is part of it.

I am very proud of you. I worked in the Legislature some years ago and got involved in economic development – this is the first thing I got involved in. I enjoyed it immensely; I was on the board down at the Iowa Department of Economic Development for a time, not that we need to reminisce about that. When people can come together and do what you have done and what you have demonstrated, things really happen. This group has just demonstrated that in such a positive way. This is something that makes it helpful for us, as a delegation. Give us a chance to try that in this area here, you will see a good result. You will know whether you have a good concept or not. We will put our heart and soul into it, and people will work together, whether it is the Urbandales, whether it is the Clives, any of these communities, come together and say, “We want to be part of that, and we want it to be better.” I am very proud this is happening and we can be part of it. I think there are going to be great results. I can tell you that there are some other things we are working on in other parts of the state and so on, and there is a real need when you have limited resources that things come together, whether it is intermodal or whatever it is, to get the biggest bang for, and that is what everybody is looking for. You cannot have all these individual things because there are not the resources to go there, but you can come together and put your arms around it – that is what they want. It makes sense, and that is what we ought to do. I am very pleased that this is happening. I look forward to the results of it. We are very proud to be a partner in the capacity that we have and look forward to what comes next; there is something out there waiting for us, and we are going to do it. With this kind of teamwork, it will happen, and we will prove that we are good at what we do. Thank you so much.

Tom Kane: In closing, I think representing the organization I do, the Des Moines Area MPO, we are recognized nationally for collaboration. I think this is, as someone said, the capstone. It is because of the leadership of the people to the right – local, Congressional leadership as well. I thank Angela, Martha, Richard on behalf of Senator Tom Harkin, the Congressman Leonard Boswell, and repeat what I was remiss in not doing earlier and what Martha said, given the schedule, given what is going on in the next few days winding up on November 2nd, Senator Grassley and his staff were invited, Congressman Latham as well, because, without their support in working for Iowa – and this is for the good of Iowa... We appreciate you being here. In a few minutes, Ms. Connolly is going to get to chair the group that is going to try to meet the deadlines of getting all the paperwork put together. Again, thank you for coming and sharing with us this morning what is a great event for the future of central Iowa. Thank you very much.