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**U.S. Department of Transportation Signs Record of Decision
for St. Croix River Crossing**
Successful Environmental Streamlining Process Moves Project Forward

U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters today announced that the Department has signed a Record of Decision (ROD) for the St. Croix River Crossing to connect Washington County, Minn., and St. Croix County, Wis., clearing the way for forward progress on the long-planned bridge.

The Secretary said a unique collaborative process aimed at speeding decisions on important transportation projects around the country led to the breakthrough for the St. Croix River project, which was selected in 2002 to be part of the Environmental Streamlining process. That process, created as a result of an executive order signed by President Bush, requires top-level federal, state and local officials to complete difficult environmental and regulatory permitting reviews as quickly and thoroughly as possible.

“After years in limbo, this project is moving forward because everyone was able to work together, cutting through red tape while at the same time being good stewards of the environment. This project is showing the nation that you can ask hard questions, apply rigorous standards and still make tough decisions in a reasonable amount of time,” **Secretary Peters** said.

Minnesota Lt. Gov./Transportation Commissioner Carol Molnau agreed. “This project will help meet the transportation needs for both states, while protecting our truly remarkable natural resources along the wild and scenic St. Croix River,” she said.

“Today is truly a great day for the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin,” said **Frank Busalacchi, WisDOT Secretary**. “We have broken through years of gridlock through a stakeholder process that brought all parties together to find a solution that we can all be proud of.”

The ROD is the federally required environmental-decision document that explains the reasons for the project decision, summarizes mitigation measures required by the project and documents the approval of park and historic lands issues. Once completed, the new river crossing will replace the 75-year-old Stillwater bridge, which will be preserved for use as a pedestrian crossing under the terms of the decision.

As a result of today’s announcement, preliminary work is beginning on this project, Secretary Peters said. The state Departments of Transportation in Minnesota and Wisconsin have already started a Transit Feasibility Study, Lift Bridge management plan development, removal of the existing Terra Terminal building and nominations of eligible historic properties.

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The Environmental Streamlining executive order authorizes the Secretary of Transportation to select important transportation projects that would be subject to an accelerated decision-making process overseen by the most senior federal officials. The selection criteria for the projects include the national or regional significance of the project, the number of federal agencies that must be involved in the decision process, local support and the potential benefit of getting a final decision. Nothing in the decision process circumvents the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Secretary Peters said.

Under the order, federal officials with responsibility for reviewing, permitting and ultimately deciding to approve transportation projects must commit to a faster, higher level, review process. Federal agencies, including the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Interior and Defense, and the Environmental Protection Agency, dedicate senior staff to attend regular meetings to identify challenges, find solutions and ultimately make decisions about projects, Secretary Peters said.

For more information on the St. Croix River Crossing Web site, visit
<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/stcroix/index.html>

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