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Marsden:

Employee Commitment Fuels
Support for Central Corridor

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Marsden: Employee Commitment Fuels Support for Central Corridor

It started 55 years ago out of Skip Marsden's car. Today, Saint Paul-based Marsden is one of the largest privately held businesses in the cleaning, building maintenance and specialty services industry.

And although the company now employs more than 8,000 people and operates in 20 states, the corporation has stayed true to the entrepreneurial values that motivated Skip Marsden back in 1957.

"As we've grown over the years and acquired a variety of companies, our approach has always been to provide additional support and resources while leaving the businesses untouched," said Guy Mingo, CEO of Marsden. "We want to let the organization's entrepreneurial spirit live on — it's the very thing that's kept us passionate about our business."

The heart and soul of any business, Mingo believes, is its workforce. Without exceptional employees, he is certain that Marsden wouldn't be the company it is today. Mingo himself started a career with the company as a janitor and worked his way up with the support of management. "In this business, our product is our people. They are the future; it's important we provide employees the resources they need to be successful."

Marsden's commitment to its workforce is fueling the company's support for the Central Corridor. The proposed light rail line, which would link downtowns Minneapolis and Saint Paul, is slated to run right by one of Marsden's key facilities on University Avenue.

CENTRAL CORRIDOR: A ROUTE TO BETTER BUSINESS

More than 90 percent of Marsden's employees in Minneapolis and Saint Paul currently use public transit as their primary method of transportation to and from work. Mingo said the company became acutely aware of this fact during the Metro Transit bus strike four years ago. "We knew a bus strike would have a crippling effect on the mobility of our workforce," Mingo said. "The importance of additional transit became immediately clear to us."

Specifically, Mingo says Central Corridor would provide an efficient, affordable way for Marsden employees to get to work. The company's University Avenue building is a hub of activity, serving as the headquarters for all employee education and training. "It's financially not

feasible for our employees to drive and park downtown," Mingo said.

Beyond the benefits to Marsden's workforce, the proposed light rail line would make doing local business more efficient and cost-effective. Mingo said congestion on Minnesota roads is a serious issue affecting the company's customer service, construction cleanup, and sales and management teams. "When you've got employees driving 20-30,000 miles each year in the metro area, there's a lot of time and money being wasted sitting in traffic," Mingo said. "Many of our roads are inadequate for traffic levels, and we need solutions to reduce the congestion."

But Mingo and the company weren't always light rail supporters. It was only after Mingo saw firsthand the success of the Hiawatha line did he take notice.

"Shortly after Hiawatha started running, Marsden's armored car division was making daily pickups at the fair boxes," he said. "We had to add additional pickup times because the fares were piling up — ridership was surpassing everyone's expectations."

A HOLISTIC VIEW

Because of Marsden's nationwide reach, Mingo has the opportunity to examine a variety of business climates. Compared to other cities, he believes Minnesota is far more service oriented; people here value good service and are willing to pay for it.

"In many respects, Minnesota is a cut above other markets," Mingo said. "But one of the areas where we fall behind is transportation. Our investment has not stayed ahead or even kept pace with growth."

The ineffectiveness of Minnesota's transportation system only adds to existing challenges facing businesses today, Mingo said. Globalization and keeping pace with an ever-changing workforce are just two mounting pressures businesses must tackle to remain competitive. For example, Marsden's employee training is administered in seven different languages, and being bilingual is a necessity for managers of the company.

In addition to the impact on business, Mingo fears that without investment in Central Corridor, Minnesota as a state and a region will suffer. He believes a sound transportation infrastructure is critical to an

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exceptional quality of life, and the proposed line would create a transit system for citizens across the state. "I'm excited about Central Corridor as a regional hub for people to visit the downtowns to shop, play and work," Mingo said. "Visitors travel to our cities from all over Minnesota, and we'll miss huge opportunities if we don't address the need for transit."

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Mingo admits that moving forward with Central Corridor won't be easy. He acknowledges that businesses along the proposed line will be severely inconvenienced during construction — customer and employee access and parking will be challenging. But he says these short-term pains will be worth the long-term rewards.

For now, Mingo remains hopeful legislative leaders will recognize the importance of Central Corridor and secure funding for the project in 2008. "We're losing time, and the problem is only getting worse," he said. "It's always difficult to step off that curb and move forward. But once it happens, people usually look back and say it was definitely a smart move."