

Minnesota State Rail Plan

OPEN HOUSE ROUND 2 SUMMARY

Duluth, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Duluth, MN on Tuesday, February 3rd, 2015 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at the Duluth Union Depot Great Hall. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised in local Duluth news outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first Duluth Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 6 attendees signed-in
- 0 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** Freight expansion and the concerns associated with those potential plans was a main topic of the night. Attendees were interested in freight rail expansion plans in the Twin Ports region and how they might assist or deteriorate conditions in the Port of Duluth area.
- **Passenger Rail:** General support for the Northern Lights Express (NLX) High Speed Rail project was demonstrated by those in attendance. Some concerns were raised in regards to performance contracts with BNSF, where NLX would operate, and cited 2014 Empire Builder delays as a reference. Respondents also requested that ultimate destinations for passenger service be shown on future maps, such as full routings to Kansas City from Duluth.
- **General:** Due to another high interest Duluth city planning meeting conflicting with the Rail Plan open house, attendance was generally thin. Although attendance was light, attendees were actively engaged in rail projects around Duluth, including the NLX line.

Eau Claire, WI

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Eau Claire, WI on Monday, February 2nd, 2015 from 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM at the CVTC Business Education Center, Room 103A. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised in local Eau Claire news, television and radio outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first Eau Claire Open House, as well as Open Houses around Minnesota.

Open House participation included:

- 55 attendees signed-in
- 9 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** Some concerns were raised in regards to silica sand transport on freight rail. Respondents requested that rail line infrastructure that carries hazardous material be upgraded. Others asked if freight shipments could be moved more from trucks to trains to relieve congested highways.
- **Passenger Rail:** The large majority of comments and questions asked were about passenger rail development from the Twin Cities to the Chippewa Valley Region, specifically Eau Claire. A large contingency of respondents expressed strong support for passenger rail development. The West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition, a grassroots group that supports passenger rail to the region, was present and passed out information to members of the public. Other questions raised revolved around potential public-private partnerships, privately operated trains, and how citizens can expedite the development process and express support.
- **General:** Similar to the first Open House, the respondents in Eau Claire demonstrated strong support for passenger rail development from Minneapolis/St. Paul. Some concerns were raised about using non-automobile transportation methods once rail users disembarked from the train in Minnesota. Other suggestions were made to allow roll-on-roll-off capabilities for bicycles on the trains and to sell annual off-peak passes to riders who would want to visit the Twin Cities for entertainment purposes on the weekends.

Mankato, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Mankato, MN on Thursday, January 22nd, 2015 from 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM at the Mankato Intergovernmental Center. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised in local Mankato news and radio outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first Mankato Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 16 attendees signed-in
- 3 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** Citing the recent safety worries with oil train traffic, several comments suggested looking into improvements and mandated safety protocol near at-grade rail crossings with roadways.

- **Passenger Rail:** Several questions about passenger rail development to Mankato were asked and the timeline for that potential service. Other questions were asked about the timeline and eventual travel speed of other high speed rail alignments, as well as the “Phase” system of corridor priority. One comment suggested stopping the proposed Southwest LRT in the Twin Cities area and using state funds for greater Minnesota rail improvement projects.
- **General:** Many in attendance were thankful that railroad companies of all sizes are beginning to improve their infrastructure and rolling stock.

Northfield, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Northfield, MN on Monday, February 2nd, 2015 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at Carleton College. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised in local Northfield news and radio outlets. The open house was held directly after a Regional Leaders Meeting that discussed passenger and general freight rail investment near and around Northfield. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first Northfield Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 27 attendees signed-in
- 9 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** Several comments mentioned concerns about at-grade crossings across existing tracks that split east and west Northfield, and several in attendance requested that an above grade crossing be constructed to connect the two sides of town. Some respondents also noted potential safety hazards with train blockages stopping emergency vehicles from crossing the road.
- **Passenger Rail:** The majority of comments centered around respondents’ desires to develop passenger rail service from the Twin Cities to Northfield and southward to Des Moines via Albert Lea. Public members ranging from college students to retired seniors strongly expressed their support for this rail line, and many were pleased that the route had been upgraded to Phase I status in the 2015 State Rail Plan.
- **General:** A wide range of comments were made at the Open House, but most general comments referred to the desire for passenger rail development to Northfield and improving the safety of existing freight lines. A heightened sense of rail concerns was noticeable, as several respondents did not want rail to divide the town. Other comments referred to wildlife safety near rail lines and economic benefits of rail to the area.

Red Wing, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Red Wing, MN on Wednesday, January 21st, 2015 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at Red Wing City Hall Council Chambers. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, comment forms, and project handouts. The open house was advertised in local Red Wing news outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first Red Wing Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 7 attendees signed-in
- 0 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on Minnesota's rail improvement needs, passenger rail planning, and any other feedback. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** Questions primarily focused on safety and Zip Rail. Two attendees noted the issue of grade crossing safety on the CP line through Lakeville, Red Wing, and Winona.
- **Passenger Rail:** Zip Rail questions included opposition and concerns about farmland.

Rochester, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Rochester, MN on Thursday, February 26th, 2015 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at the Rochester Community College Heintz Center. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, comment forms, and project handouts. The open house was advertised in local Rochester news outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 7 attendees signed-in
- 0 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on Minnesota's rail improvement needs, passenger rail planning, and any other feedback. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **General:** Question and answer continued for an extended period. It focused on grade separation spacing, intermediate stations, status of Zip Rail study and timing of implementation. Blocked crossings and grade separations, as well as future of hazmat shipments in area, were also discussed.

Saint Cloud, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in St. Cloud, MN on Thursday, January 29th, 2015 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at the Mississippi Community Room in the St. Cloud Public Library. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised in local St. Cloud news and radio outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first St. Cloud Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 19 attendees signed-in
- 4 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Passenger Rail:** Most rail comments and questions revolved around Northstar commuter rail and its extension to St. Cloud. Comments noted a need for more Northstar publicity and more frequent service once the line is connected to St. Cloud. Several noted the need for the rail to assist the elderly to get to Minneapolis and noted that the longer it takes to implement the extension, the less number of people will ride it.

Saint Paul, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in St. Paul, MN on Monday, February 2nd, 2015 from 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM at the MnDOT office building. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised around the building and via MnDOT's project website. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first St. Paul Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 8 attendees signed-in
- 0 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** Some concerns were raised in regards to the timeline for general rail safety improvements, and attendees requested if funding could be more readily available for critical areas.

- **Passenger Rail:** Members of the group CCARL—Citizens Concerned about Rail Line—were in attendance, and expressed their concern about the Zip Rail project to Rochester. Others also asked about the status of the Empire Builder second daily train developments, and the on-time performance of Amtrak trains through the corridor.
- **General:** Most respondent questions pertained to general topics raised in the presentation, such as rail funding mechanisms, overall rail safety, and the protocol for placing certain freight rail improvement projects in the State Rail Plan and long range funding plans. Respondents also requested that future open houses be advertised more to the general public.

Willmar, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Willmar, MN on Monday, February 9th, 2015 from 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM at the MnDOT District 8 Headquarters. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised in local Willmar news outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first Willmar Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 15 attendees signed-in
- 0 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** The majority of the discussion pertained to freight rail improvements, as attendees continued to express safety concerns about the existing nearby lines. After some respondents were curious about the public involvement of rail improvement projects, it was expressed that the Willmar Wye is a top priority for the state. Other comments received were about the differences between Class I and short lines.
- **Passenger Rail:** Little conversation was had regarding passenger rail; however, officials from the City of Benson, MN were in attendance and expressed their desire to include the University of Minnesota – Morris as part of the passenger rail network.
- **General:** The majority of respondents were curious about the future of existing rail improvements, their funding mechanisms, and how public money is appropriated to these projects. Some were curious about Governor Dayton's transportation bill, and how some of the new funds would be appropriated to rail projects.

Winona, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held in Winona, MN on Monday, January 26th, 2015 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at the Winona City Hall Council Chambers. Materials available included Rail Plan display boards, a Rail Plan presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. The open house was advertised in local

Winona news and radio outlets. The purpose of the open house was primarily to share current State Rail Plan content and to present comments heard at the first Winona Open House, as well as Open Houses around the state.

Open House participation included:

- 35 attendees signed-in
- 4 attendees filled out comment forms

COMMENTS

Participants were asked to provide comments on the current condition of the State Rail Plan, and ask questions related to rail planning efforts. The following summarizes participant responses.

- **Rail Improvements:** Several comments were made about the inconvenience and safety concerns with freight rail traffic blocking public roads. A local police report was also displayed at the Open House explaining an incident with a railroad engineer in regards to a road blockage. Many respondents strongly suggested to upgrade some at-grade rail crossings to rail overpasses, and to generally improve safety along rail corridors. One comment suggested to give tax credits to railroad companies as incentive to improve infrastructure near population centers. Other comments received discussed a desire to cover rail cars carrying frac sand, double track rail sections in the Coulee Region, and to have freight trains pass through towns at a slower speed.
- **Passenger Rail:** Some recommendations about passenger rail coverage were made. Upgrading existing Amtrak service and expanding passenger service from Winona to Rochester were main talking points. Another respondent suggested developing a local commuter rail line from Southwestern Minnesota communities to the Twin Cities area.
- **General:** A wide range of comments were made at the Open House, but most were based on improving rail safety through the area. Some respondents suggested to forbid hazardous rail shipments from passing through the Mississippi River region, and instead build new rail infrastructure more inland. In another aspect, the positive economic impact of the rail industry was noted by some respondents, and others were pleased with the safety improvements planned by railroad companies.