

Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan

Public Comment Themes

Summarized from E-Mail comments received December 31, 2009 - January 29, 2010

Planning Process Issues

- Many comments expressing general support for the plan
- First phase is too aggressive – consider three phases, select only highest priority in first phase
- Shoot for higher speed (150 mph+)
- Focus on true high speed (186 mph+), completely separated right of way with no crossings whatsoever
- Focus on the future need of a passenger rail system as resources become scarce in the future
- State in the plan that other unidentified corridors can be added to the phases in the future if Amtrak or other states consider them for service
- Address the future need to accommodate the aging baby boomers who will have limited mobility but still want to travel
- The incremental approach is lengthy and will cost more over time than a more aggressive approach
- Both the railroad system and the entire intermodal transportation system need to be interoperable to ensure system resiliency

Chicago Service

- The Plan should first focus on developing service to Chicago
- Comments received supporting Rochester, River, and Eau Claire alignments for Chicago routing
- Chicago service should utilize St. Paul Union Depot

Rochester Issues

- Many comments expressing support for Rochester HSR as part of the Chicago MWRRI route, with some comments against it
- Comments received for Rochester as a stand-alone route from the twin cities
- Comments received for a non-HSR Rochester route on existing tracks
- Comments received against the Rochester bypass
- If only the CP Short Line is selected as the Minneapolis-St. Paul connection route, then a Rochester Line approaching St. Paul from the West would require a reverse move to service Minneapolis

Cost Issues

- Greenfield construction cost figures are too low compared to rehabbing existing tracks
- Comments that rail is pork barrel spending and a waste of tax dollars
- Existing transportation infrastructure should be fixed first before investing in new rail options
- Accurate ridership and cost estimates are important to assess cost effectiveness
- Focus only on cost-effective routes and utilize cost-saving measures

Regional Issues

- The Plan needs greater statewide reach (northern Minnesota, southwestern Minnesota)
- Rail connections to airports are important for Regional Trade Centers in Greater Minnesota with limited or no air service
- Comments received both for and against the Duluth Northern Lights Express line

Northstar Expansion/Service Issues

- Comments received both for and against Northstar service expansion to St. Cloud – proponents highlight the need to connect the region and potential ridership, opponents highlight the cost and rider subsidies for capital outlay
- Northstar schedule needs to be improved to accommodate a wider range of work schedules
- Need to improve speeds on the Northstar line between Minneapolis and Fridley

Safety and Security

- Southern Rail Corridor would expose the public to 41 new mostly rural at-grade railroad crossings
- Mn/DOT should consider safety, security, reliability, human factors, and environmental issues when making passenger rail investments and provide adequate oversight during operations