

Summary of January, 2010, State Rail Plan Open Houses, Issues and Responses

Duluth, January 11, 2010

Mankato, January 13, 2010

St. Paul, January 14, 2010

1. Is the high-speed passenger rail system beneficial given its estimated costs?

The State Rail Plan has determined that the option for a high-capacity, high-speed rail transportation is not only desirable, but affordable and even preferred as fuel prices rise and larger volumes of travelers shift to an available rail system. It continues to potentially offer us faster, more economical alternatives in the near future to automobile and air travel on intercity corridors of 100-500 miles with sufficient density and demand. Part of the answer in making this a cost effective program is an intentional, well-planned and incremental approach to building the regional and national system similar to the Interstate System of highways. Minnesota will positively benefit from expanded transportation options including high speed trains that tie into the emerging national rail system and use of the best available technologies, designs and operating methods.

2. How realistic is the idea of building out an entire system, instead of just one main corridor such as Twin Cities-Chicago?

- The system covers 100% of Metro Area and 41% of Greater Minnesota population if built out
- Growth of ridership is heavily dependent on developing a base of steady rail users, which in turn depends on the extent, coverage, frequency, reliability, speed and convenience of an integrated system of coordinated routes and schedules. Passenger transfers between routes and on through services may add from 10% to 20% in ridership (NLX, 10%; MWRRRI, 20% statistics from studies), and a feeder bus system and coordinated transit services could add 10-15% ridership on certain routes (MWRRRI statistic)
- A system approach also promotes direct downtown services (Minneapolis and St. Paul), key suburban stops and options for all-day travel to a variety of destinations. For example, service through the Twin Cities would allow travelers from Duluth to proceed on a High Speed Rail service to Chicago and on to Cleveland in a completed system, possibly even with a single seat ride
- Wisconsin and the other partners in the nine-state MWRRRI compact are all supportive of this approach, and it reflects the national vision as well

3. Aren't these costs too high and unaffordable?

Costs will be refined as projects develop, and the State Rail Plan uses conservative methodology and estimates, but the system is both affordable and cost effective given the benefits. We are still in the formative stage of federal funding and grant formulas, partnership agreements with stakeholders and railroads, political commitments and project development. Most of the 18 states operating regional rail services fund operating subsidies out of general funds, and show a bipartisan and heavily supportive recognition that rail transportation is important to their overall transportation systems and economic health. Other modes are more heavily subsidized, such as the federal air transportation budget of \$12-15 billion annually.

4. Is there support for freight improvements in Minnesota?

There is significant public, industry, union, and political support for the freight aspects of the Plan. This includes legislative representatives who have been active with area shortlines and with the State Rail Plan itself. There is also a clear recognition that freight rail is essential to Minnesota, needs increased capacity and needs improvement to support the overlay of an effective and fluid passenger rail network.

5. How will the plan address the homeland security and anti-terrorist need for rail infrastructure and passenger security and screening as compared to airline security levels?

Amtrak and Homeland Security are aware of security risks at passenger stations and on trains, and are actively working on additional measures. As ridership increases, security measures may become more extensive. However, the level of risk is considered lower than comparable airline risks. A bomb on a train at ground level would be less catastrophic than a bomb in a pressurized jet at altitude, and the secondary but larger risks, such as planes being flown into buildings, is a larger factor than impacts possible from train operations.

6. What are next steps, in particular to determine the Chicago Route?

Mn/DOT in its leadership role will need to pursue environmental assessments and preliminary engineering on at least four of the six system corridors, including Milwaukee-Twin Cities. This will include an FRA-directed alternatives analysis that will determine which route should receive the next grants for development. This work is intended to be completed in partnership with Wisconsin by September 2010