

Minnesota Statewide Rail Plan

OPEN HOUSE ROUND 1 SUMMARY – DULUTH, MN

A public open house for the Minnesota Statewide Rail Plan was held in Duluth, MN on Monday, November 17, 2014 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at the Duluth Depot. 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 various local media outlets and included television coverage. The purpose of the open house was to introduce content and educate attendees on the MN Statewide Rail Plan and provide opportunities for participants to influence Plan development.



Open House participation included:

- 29 attendees signed-in
- 10 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:** A variety of suggestions were mentioned by respondents to improve existing rail operations, including more double tracking at bottleneck points and increasing rail car quantities so more commodities can be transported. Safety was a major concern, and many respondents desired track improvements, better road-rail intersection safety, and new rail bypasses at busy roadways to avoid train blockages. Other recommended improvements included developing freight rail beltlines around population centers to increase speed, and building new sidings on existing lines for safety and speed purposes.
- **Passenger Rail:** Many respondents were in support of passenger rail expansion service in Minnesota and across the Midwest. In addition to questions regarding the proposed Northern Lights Express (NLX) high speed rail between Duluth and Minneapolis, respondents desired passenger rail development to Mankato, Northfield, Chicago, Des Moines, and Omaha. Several comments requested studying the feasibility to expand NLX to Thunder Bay, Ontario. Some desire to terminate NLX in Superior rather than in Duluth was raised. Some were concerned about the lack of mutual support for passenger rail with surrounding states like Wisconsin. Overall, most in attendance wanted to move the timetable for passenger rail development forward.
- **General:** A desire to establish more commuter rail and LRT in larger Minnesota cities that are not Minneapolis or St. Paul was raised. Other comments received mentioned a desire to study driver behavior during rail blockages and have BNSF logistics work more efficiently to avoid the long blockages in the first place.