



Why is there a new study for the Southern Rail Corridor Freight Rail Planning Project?

On December 16, 2009, Congress directed funds to the Southern Rail Corridor Freight Rail Planning Project to evaluate the potential to mitigate and/or relocate the existing Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern Railroad (DM&E) freight rail line around Rochester to accommodate a potential increase in train traffic. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the grantee of these federal funds, has commenced a Feasibility and Alternative Analysis Study ("Study"). This Study will advance the most promising alternatives, including improvements to existing infrastructure and consideration of a bypass around Rochester, through completion of an initial environmental analysis of all alternatives. This Study is consistent with the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) determination that to be eligible for future funding for mitigation or new infrastructure, a feasibility and alternatives analysis study must be conducted. Thus, even though issues related to the Southern Rail Corridor may have been studied in the past, the current Study ensures eligibility for federal funding through an FRA-compliant process. Another significant difference to past studies is increased public involvement opportunities. The public will be encouraged to provide input into the alternatives analysis with the goal that issues deemed most critical to the public are addressed to achieve informed consent.

What are the elements of the Study?

Development of the Purpose and Need Statement is the first step when analyzing alternatives for the Southern Rail Corridor. The Statement will articulate the fundamental reasons why the project is being proposed and the specific need for action that any project alternative, if subsequently selected, must address in order to satisfy the purpose for the project.

The Purpose and Need Statement will be followed by an alternatives analysis which will provide the necessary technical information that will be utilized in the evaluation of alternatives. This alternatives analysis provides a framework for the identification of the most promising alternative(s) and ensures that following public input, MnDOT, in consultation with the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority (OCRRA), will have sufficient information to present initial documentation of conditions and promising alternatives to the FRA.

The following alternatives will be studied:

- Analysis of potential future levels of traffic, including commercial trends in rail served industries and proposed passenger rail.
- Analysis of No Build option with and without increased freight and passenger rail traffic.
- Analysis of mitigation of the current route through Rochester with and without increased freight and passenger rail traffic.
- Analysis of proposed Southern Rail Corridor (SRC) alternative.
- Analysis of all other reasonable alternative freight bypass routes.

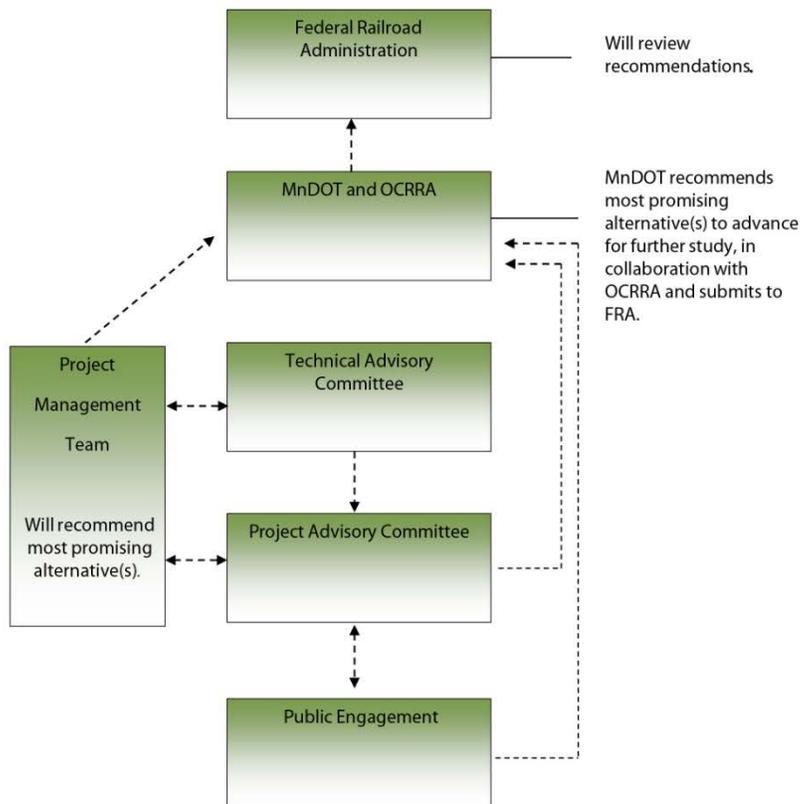
Input will be sought from the public and various Study committees on such issues as freight rail transportation options and costs, projected impact on economic development and property values, mitigation of the current route through Rochester, social impacts and community livability, public safety and health, and the environment.

What will be the role of the public in the Study?

A variety of Study committees have been established including the Project Management Team (PMT) which will be responsible for guiding the work with input from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Project Advisory Committee (PAC). The Kimley-Horn consultant team is performing the Study.

Twenty members of the public were selected for the PAC based upon applications received. In addition to attending four PAC meetings, the PAC will play a key role in the overall stakeholder involvement process. The PAC will provide a conduit for integrating the values and perspectives of citizens, communities, businesses, and institutions into the Study process. The PAC’s review role includes the review and comment on all key deliverables identified for the Study. The PAC’s communication role is central and multi-faceted in the Study process. PAC representatives are key partners in sharing Study information with organizations they may represent and with the general public.

Following the completion of a draft Purpose and Need Statement, the public will be invited to an Open House to provide input on the Purpose and Need Statement. A second Open House will be scheduled to receive input on alternatives and screening criteria. Following the completion of detailed technical analysis, a third Open House will be scheduled to discuss the technical analysis and comment on the most promising alternatives. Following public input, the Alternatives Analysis will be completed including the identification of the most promising alternatives which will be considered by MnDOT, in consultation with the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority, before being submitted to the FRA.



What will be the next steps following the Study?

Based upon the most promising alternatives identified in this Study, MnDOT and OCRRA will be in consultation with the FRA to determine next steps, if any.

Any correspondence or questions may be sent to SouthernRailCorridor@gmail.com