
The MN&S Freight Rail Study partners are working together to offer answers to some of the more frequently asked questions from the public. This list of questions and answers will be updated regularly to respond to questions received.

Study Process Questions

1) Who is involved in the MN&S Rail Study, and what role does each play?

Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRRA)

The Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRRA) was established in 1980 as a political subdivision and local government unit of Minnesota. It was established as a separate political entity to promote transit development and implement interim uses of rail corridors. The Board of Commissioners for the Authority consists of the seven members of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners.

The role of the HCRRRA for the MN&S Rail Study is to oversee the study by managing the process, resources, and budget. The HCRRRA and MnDOT are sharing study costs.

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)

MnDOT is responsible for developing the Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan ("State Rail Plan") pursuant to Minnesota Statute Minnesota Session Law 2008, Section 174.03 subdivision 1b. The Plan guides the future of the rail system and rail services in the State.

The February 2010 State Rail Plan says that MnDOT should cooperate in study development and evaluation of alternatives for the 'Kenilworth project', including providing:

- technical resources,
- potential access to Federal funds, and
- assessment of consistency of alternatives with the State Rail Plan.

MnDOT is paying for a portion of the MN&S Rail Study costs, and serves as the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) for the environmental review process.

Railroad Companies

Three railroad companies, Twin Cities & Western (TCW), Canadian Pacific (CP), and BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) are participating in the Study process through their involvement on the Project Management Team (PMT). These three companies own and/or operate rail lines in the areas of interest. As the proposed action would be within right-of-way currently owned by the CP and the BNSF, both railroad entities are decision makers in the process. The role of the three railroad companies in the study process is to be a resource to the Project Management Team and to ensure that current and future business operations on the line can be conducted safely and efficiently.

City of St. Louis Park

The City of St. Louis Park is a key stakeholder and a partner with the HCRRRA and MnDOT providing input on managing the study process. As a stakeholder the City of St. Louis Park participates in the Project Management Team along with other representatives from the community.

Other Stakeholders (St. Louis Park Schools, communities and businesses)

Stakeholders have a role in providing input and guidance that is representative of their

group. Stakeholders have opportunities to provide input at the Project Management Team meetings and through the website, www.MN&Srailstudy.org.

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

The FRA was created by the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (49 U.S.C. 103, Section 3(e)(1)). The purpose of FRA is to: promulgate and enforce rail safety regulations; administer railroad assistance programs; conduct research and development in support of improved railroad safety and national rail transportation policy; provide for the rehabilitation of Northeast Corridor rail passenger service; and consolidate government support of rail transportation activities. A wealth of information about railroad administration and regulations can be found on the FRA website: www.fra.dot.gov

While this proposed project is currently not using federal funds, it is anticipated that based on the nature of the project, funding could be pursued through the FRA. If FRA becomes a funding partner, FRA would need to sign off on the environmental review documents.

Technical Questions

2) How many trains are currently operating in the Kenilworth Corridor; what length are these trains and what type of cargo do they carry?

From Twin Cities & Western (TCW) railroad:

Freight traffic can and does vary a lot depending on business and economic decisions made by the railroads as they accommodate customer needs. At this time, the following characterizes traffic in the Kenilworth Corridor, but see question #3 to learn more:

Currently the Twin Cities & Western (TC&W) operates two trains into the Twin Cities from Hopkins six to seven days per week. Both trains work in and out of the Hopkins/Minnetonka/St. Louis Park area. Between the two trains there is an average of 50 - 75 cars and seasonally can exceed 100 cars. They carry grain on the way to St. Paul and return via the same route.

TC&W also runs longer "unit" trains. The number of unit trains varies per week. Some weeks there might be none and some weeks there might be 3, with an average of 5 - 7 unit trains per month, at an average length per train of 80 to 100 cars. These unit trains are carrying ethanol or coal. The ethanol trains return via the same route. The coal trains return via another route, not along the Kenilworth line.

While typical train loads currently traveling on the Kenilworth line carry grain with fewer numbers of trains carrying ethanol and coal, other materials may also be transported based on customer needs.

3) What are TCW's growth plans?

From Twin Cities & Western (TCW) railroad:

We have been growth oriented since we purchased the rail line in 1991, but our growth depends on the growth of the south central Minnesota economy. Since we are a short line, you do not see "through" train traffic on our line (compared to Seattle-Chicago train traffic that goes over the BNSF through Minnesota, etc.). It is highly unlikely, but not impossible that through traffic would use our line to get from points east of Minnesota to points west of Minnesota – never say never, but not on the horizon now.

We have seen a change in interest in shipping via rail once fuel prices rose a few years ago, so I would think we will see moderate growth going forward. 15 years ago we could not have foreseen the growth in the ethanol industry, so today we cannot predict beyond 3 years what additional possibilities are out there. With respect to grain, we currently have the right to operate on the MN&S corridor, both north to get to the Camden river terminal in north Minneapolis as

well as south to get to the Savage river terminals. The river market is largely dependent on the rates the ocean ships charge to get to Asia from the Pacific Northwest ports compared to the US Gulf ports. In the period 1998-2002, the rates favored shipping to Asia via the US Gulf through the Panama Canal to Asia (we shipped over 6000 cars via the MN&S track), but since 2002 the rates have favored the Pacific Northwest ports. With the expansion of the Panama Canal scheduled for completion in 2013, we may very well see a return of that traffic, but that traffic will traverse the MN&S regardless of whether the re-route occurs or not.

4) How many trains are currently operating on the MN&S Line; what length are these trains and what type of cargo do they carry?

From Canadian Pacific:

Canadian Pacific is the only company running trains on the MN&S line today. TCW has trackage rights, but is not currently running trains on the MN&S line. The Canadian Pacific (CP) operates one local assignment, round trip, 5 days per week on this property. The length of the train is variable, as a number of the commodities on the line are seasonal in nature. Typically, the size ranges between 10-30 cars per day. Generally, the commodities going through this area include salt (water softening and deicing), plastic pellets, scrap materials (mostly metal), lumber, brick and cement. Due to the downturn in the economy and construction, in particular, volumes over the last two years have been low. Volumes tend to be heaviest in April - October during the building season. Most of the salt moves in the fall, when companies decide to build up their inventories before winter; however, a snowy and icy winter can trigger additional loads if deicing demand gets high. In addition, the line serves a transload/warehouse facility in Bloomington which can take any type of commodity (including food grade), so the commodity mix can change easily depending upon the client using the warehouse.

5) How is the speed of trains regulated? What about the speed of trains at highway-rail grade crossings?

From the Minnesota Department of Transportation:

The speed of trains is regulated by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and is based on the current condition of the track. As speeds of trains increase, track tolerances become more narrow and inspection frequency may increase. A railroad determines what speed it wishes to travel at and then agrees to meet the FRA track standards to travel at that speed. Speeds at highway-rail grade crossings depend on the type of active warning device (flashing lights/gates) and are determined based on the time it would take for a vehicle to safely get across the track. The State Commissioner of Transportation has the authority to regulate speeds at crossings based on this safety condition. The Commissioner has no jurisdiction to order a change in speed at a crossing with a passive (crossbuck/no signal) warning device.

From Twin Cities & Western Railroad:

The current speed of the TC&W trains entering St. Louis Park from the west is 25 mph, but they slow to 10 mph on the Kenilworth line. The speed on the MN&S line currently is also 10 mph. The MN&S and Kenilworth lines are close to the same length.

6) What is the history of railroad lines in St. Louis Park?

For those interested in the history of freight rail development in St. Louis Park, useful information can be found in the March 1999 "St. Louis Park Railroad Study" – see Historical Overview section http://www.hennepin.us/files/HennepinUS/Housing%20Community%20Works%20and%20Transit/Regional%20Railroad%20Authority/Authority/Railroad_Study_March_1999.pdf. In addition, historical information can be found at: <http://www.slphistory.org/history/railroads.asp>

<u>Mitigation and Safety Questions</u>

7) What are "quiet zones", and how could such zones be used to mitigate impacts of freight rail?

From the Minnesota Department of Transportation:

Quiet Zones are sections of track at least ½ mile in length where the train whistle does not sound at highway-rail grade crossings. To achieve a quiet zone, a community needs to apply to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a waiver of the train horn rule. A formal diagnostic of the crossing(s) within the proposed quiet zone corridor are reviewed and a determination is made as to what additional safety measures need to be added to the crossings to compensate for the lack of the train whistle. These safety measures could include, but are not limited to roadway medians, 4-quadrant gate systems, closing of crossings and wayside horns.

8) People who live close to an active freight rail line are justifiably worried about possible derailments. Who is responsible for reducing the risk and ensuring the safety of the surrounding community?

From the Minnesota Department of Transportation:

Railroads have strict requirements from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to monitor track conditions, equipment conditions and employee behavior. Given this FRA oversight, the risk of a derailment is minimized. The State of Minnesota participates in the Federal Inspector program and has a track inspector who is responsible for inspecting track conditions within the state. This track inspector supplements the inspectors provided by the FRA.