

**MINNESOTA HIGH SPEED RAIL COMMISSION MEETING
FEBRUARY 4, 2010
MEETING SUMMARY**

MEMBERS:

Dakota County RRA; Will Branning	City of Lake City; Andru Peters
Goodhue County RRA; Ron Allen	City of Red Wing; John Howe
Ramsey County RRA; Janice Rettman	City of Utica; Tate Ferguson
Wabasha County RRA; Rich Hall	City of Wabasha; John Meisch
Wabasha County RRA; David Windhorst	City of Winona; Jerry Miller
Washington County RRA; Myra Peterson	Prairie Island Indian Community*; Marc Mogan
Winona County RRA; Jim Pomeroy	La Crosse Area Planning Committee*; Tom Faella;
City of Cottage Grove; Jen Peterson	

*Ex-officio member

OTHERS:

Ramsey County RRA; Mike Rogers	Allen Lovejoy; City of St. Paul
Washington County RRA; Andy Gitzlaff	
Eric Sorensen; City of Winona	
Dennis Egan; OnBoard Midwest	
Jerry Dooley; City of Red Wing	
Bob Kastner; City of Red Wing	
Pravenna Pidaparathi; Mn/DOT	

1. INTRODUCTION

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion to approve was requested. Chair Miller clarified that there was an amended agenda. The new agenda item addressed OnBoard Midwest’s request to become an ex-officio member. Mayor Howe moved for approval of the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Peterson. The motion passed unanimously.

3. CHECKS AND CLAIMS

A motion to approve was requested. Commissioner Branning moved for approval of the checks and claims. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Peters. The motion passed unanimously.

4. MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 7, 2010 MEETING

A motion to approve was requested. Councilmember Rettman moved for approval of the November 5, 2009 and December 3, 2009 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pomeroy.

The motion passed unanimously.

5. 2010 STATE BONDING REQUEST

Mr. Rogers walked through the memo included in the Commission's packet. He noted the following requests that had been submitted that could impact high speed rail.

- **\$10 million:**
H.F. 2596; Support Mn/DOT's efforts for environmental and engineering work on the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor.
- **\$13.5 million:**
H.F. 2594; For property acquisition, environmental and engineering work related to capacity improvements in the Hoffman Interlocking/Yard area of St. Paul
- **\$8.5 million:**
H.F. 2492; For engineering, design, property acquisition, and construction at The Union Depot Multi-modal Hub in St. Paul.
- **\$13 million:**
H.F. 2500; to plan, design, engineer, and construct Northern Lights Express between Duluth and Minneapolis.

Mr. Rogers stated that interest in the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor is growing, evidenced by the January 28th announcement of ARRA funding to the Corridor for the completion of high level environmental work and alternatives analysis. The general concern is that interest and momentum may be lost if the Corridor does not have sufficient funding to continue moving forward after the completion of the ARRA funded work. Detailed environmental analysis and engineering is anticipated to cost \$50-\$52 million with 50% being paid for by the federal government and 50% by local sources. Currently Minnesota has \$16 million available for the Corridor leaving a \$10 million local funding gap which is the request being recommended by staff.

Mr. Rogers stated that due to tight deadlines for bonding requests, the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority (RCRRA) worked to secure authors and submit the \$10 million request. He added that hearings were held in the Senate on January 21 and the House on January 26 with Commissioner Peterson and Chair Miller testifying on behalf of the request and the Commission. Mr. Rogers went on to discuss how the Corridor was a state wide project, and not a Ramsey County project and that it would stand a better chance for success if the Commission assumed it and continued its advocacy for the request. Discussion ensued regarding how the importance of the request and the Commission's role.

A motion to approve Resolution 2010-01 was made by Commissioner Peterson. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pomeroy and the resolution passed unanimously.

Resolution 2010-01

Resolution supporting the request of \$10 million in State Bond Funds for environmental and engineering work the Twin Cities to Chicago High Speed Rail Corridor

WHEREAS, the Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission (hereafter known as The "Commission") is a political subdivision and local government unit of Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is established by Joint Powers Agreement by and between Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, Washington County Regional Railroad Authority, Dakota County Regional Railroad Authority, Goodhue County Regional Railroad Authority, Wabasha County Regional Railroad Authority, Winona County Regional Railroad Authority, City of St. Paul, City of St. Paul Park, City of Cottage Grove, City of Hastings, City of Lake City, City of Red Wing, City of Wabasha, City of Goodview, City of Winona, City of St. Charles, City of Utica; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is working to establish high speed intercity passenger rail service between The Union Depot in St. Paul and Chicago along the current Amtrak Empire Builder route in Minnesota which parallels the Mississippi River (River Route); and

WHEREAS, the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin have jointly contributed \$600,000 and have received \$600,000 in federal funds for the completion of Phase One Environmental Analysis and completion of an Alternatives Analysis for the Twin Cities to Madison portion of the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Commission believes that the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT) data driven analysis will result in the selection of the River Route, due to its existing passenger rail use, shorter route length and travel times, and significant traffic generators including Native American tribal interests and its higher education facilities, as the preferred alignment in Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, this analysis will be completed by September of 2010 and following the completion of this analysis the next step is to undertake detailed environmental and engineering work estimated to cost \$52 million; and

WHEREAS, state and federal funding will be sought in the amount of \$52 million, and

WHEREAS, there is current state funding for \$26 million for high speed rail of which \$16 million has been identified for the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor; and

WHEREAS, states that received the most funding from the \$8 billion in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding that was awarded on January 28, 2010 had contributed significant state resources to allow their projects to advance in the absence of federal funds; and

WHEREAS, their state investments paid significant dividends through the award of ARRA funding; and

WHEREAS, there is no currently available federal funding for the Corridor; and

WHEREAS, to continue to advance high speed rail between the Twin Cities and Chicago additional funding is needed to cover Minnesota's share of the cost.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Commission hereby requests state bonding of \$10 million to complete detailed environmental analysis and detailed engineering work on the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor; and

Mr. Rogers directed the Commission to the second part of the memo which included a request for support for the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority requests for the Union Depot and Hoffman Yard. Following discussion on the importance of these two projects to implementing high speed rail, Commission Pomeroy made a motion to approve Resolutions 2010-02. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rettman and the resolution passed unanimously.

Resolution 2010-02

Resolution supporting the request of \$8.5 million in State Bond Funds for the Union Depot Multimodal Hub and \$13.5 million for Hoffman Interlocking/Yard capacity improvements

WHEREAS, the Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission (hereafter known as The “Commission”) is a political subdivision and local government unit of Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is established by Joint Powers Agreement by and between Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, Washington County Regional Railroad Authority, Dakota County Regional Railroad Authority, Goodhue County Regional Railroad Authority, Wabasha County Regional Railroad Authority, Winona County Regional Railroad Authority, City of St. Paul, City of St. Paul Park, City of Cottage Grove, City of Hastings, City of Lake City, City of Red Wing, City of Wabasha, City of Goodview, City of Winona, City of St. Charles, City of Utica; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is working to establish high speed intercity passenger rail service between The Union Depot in St. Paul and Chicago along the current Amtrak Empire Builder route in Minnesota which parallels the Mississippi River (River Route); and

WHEREAS, the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin have jointly contributed \$600,000 and have received \$600,000 in federal funds for the completion of Phase One Environmental Analysis and completion of an Alternatives Analysis for the Twin Cities to Madison portion of the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Commission believes that the Minnesota Department of Transportation’s (Mn/DOT) data driven analysis will result in the selection of the River Route, due to its existing passenger rail use, shorter route length and travel times, and significant traffic generators including Native American tribal interests and its higher education facilities, as the preferred alignment in Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the River Route will utilize The Union Depot Multimodal Hub in downtown St. Paul as its St. Paul station; and

WHEREAS, to access The Union Depot high speed trains will need to travel through Hoffman Interlocking/Yard, an identified freight bottleneck in the State Rail Plan, and

WHEREAS, increased capacity within and through Hoffman Interlocking/Yard provides a three for one benefit for high speed, commuter and freight rail which will improve the economic competitiveness of the state; and

WHEREAS, the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority has submitted 2010 State Bonding Requests for The Union Depot Multimodal Hub in the amount of \$8.5 million for property acquisition, engineering, and construction and for Hoffman Interlocking/Yard in the amount of \$13.5 million for environmental and engineering work; and

WHEREAS, without improvements to The Union Depot and Hoffman Interlocking/Yard, high speed rail to Chicago will be delayed.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Commission supports the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority’s state bond requests of \$8.5 million for the Union Depot Multi-modal Hub and \$13.5 million for Hoffman Interlocking/Yard.

Commissioner Peterson asked that staff provide electronic copies of the resolutions to members so they would have the opportunity to take similar action.

6. 2011 FEDERAL APPROPRIATION REQUEST

Mr. Rogers directed the Commission to the Memo included in their agenda packet. He noted that the Federal Fiscal Year 2011 appropriations process is underway and this is the first year that the Commission will be able to submit a request. Each member of the congressional delegation develops a form for requestors to fill out for their project and then determines whether or not to support a funding request for the project. He added that the Commission's project impacts Congresswoman McCollum's, Congressman Kline's, Congressman Walz's, Senator Klobuchar's, and Senator Franken's districts. He discussed the need for \$26 million in federal funds to complete detailed design and environmental analysis on the Twin Cities to Madison portion of the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor. The requested amount would cover 50% of the total cost of this work. Discussion ensued about the importance of securing federal funding so that momentum would not be lost on the corridor.

Following the discussion, Commission Rettman made a motion to approve Resolutions 2010-03. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Peterson and the resolution passed unanimously.

Resolution 2010-03

Resolution supporting the request of \$26 million in Federal Funds for environmental and engineering work the Twin Cities to Chicago High Speed Rail Corridor

WHEREAS, the Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission (hereafter known as The "Commission") is a political subdivision and local government unit of Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is established by Joint Powers Agreement by and between Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, Washington County Regional Railroad Authority, Dakota County Regional Railroad Authority, Goodhue County Regional Railroad Authority, Wabasha County Regional Railroad Authority, Winona County Regional Railroad Authority, City of St. Paul, City of St. Paul Park, City of Cottage Grove, City of Hastings, City of Lake City, City of Red Wing, City of Wabasha, City of Goodview, City of Winona, City of St. Charles, City of Utica; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is working to establish high speed intercity passenger rail service between The Union Depot in St. Paul and Chicago along the current Amtrak Empire Builder route in Minnesota which parallels the Mississippi River (River Route); and

WHEREAS, the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin have jointly contributed \$600,000 and have received \$600,000 in federal funds for the completion of Phase One Environmental Analysis and completion of an Alternatives Analysis for the Twin Cities to Madison portion of the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Commission believes that the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT) data driven analysis will result in the selection of the River Route, due to its existing passenger rail use, shorter route length and travel times, and significant traffic generators including Native American tribal interests and its higher education facilities, as the preferred alignment in Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, this analysis will be completed by September of 2010 and following the completion of this analysis the next step is to undertake detailed environmental and engineering work estimated to cost \$52 million; and

WHEREAS, state and federal funding will be sought in the amount of \$52 million, and

WHEREAS, federal funding is being requested to cover 50% of the detailed environmental and engineering work cost.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Commission hereby requests federal funding of \$26 million to complete detailed environmental analysis and detailed engineering work on the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor.

Mr. Rogers directed the Commission to the second part of the memo which included a request for support for the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority federal requests for the Union Depot and Hoffman Yard. Following discussion on the importance of these two projects to implementing high speed rail, Commission Rettman made a motion to approve Resolution 2010-04. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Peterson and the resolution passed unanimously.

Resolution 2010-04

Resolution supporting the request of Federal Funds for the Union Depot Multimodal Hub and Hoffman Interlocking/Yard Capacity Improvements

WHEREAS, the Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission (hereafter known as The "Commission") is a political subdivision and local government unit of Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is established by Joint Powers Agreement by and between Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, Washington County Regional Railroad Authority, Dakota County Regional Railroad Authority, Goodhue County Regional Railroad Authority, Wabasha County Regional Railroad Authority, Winona County Regional Railroad Authority, City of St. Paul, City of St. Paul Park, City of Cottage Grove, City of Hastings, City of Lake City, City of Red Wing, City of Wabasha, City of Goodview, City of Winona, City of St. Charles, City of Utica; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is working to establish high speed intercity passenger rail service between The Union Depot in St. Paul and Chicago along the current Amtrak Empire Builder route in Minnesota which parallels the Mississippi River (River Route); and

WHEREAS, the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin have jointly contributed \$600,000 and have received \$600,000 in federal funds for the completion of Phase One Environmental Analysis and completion of an Alternatives Analysis for the Twin Cities to Madison portion of the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Commission believes that the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT) data driven analysis will result in the selection of the River Route, due to its existing passenger rail use, shorter route length and travel times, and significant traffic generators

including Native American tribal interests and its higher education facilities, as the preferred alignment in Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the River Route will utilize The Union Depot Multimodal Hub in downtown St. Paul as its St. Paul station; and

WHEREAS, to access The Union Depot high speed trains will need to travel through Hoffman Interlocking/Yard, an identified freight bottleneck in the State Rail Plan, and

WHEREAS, increased capacity within and through Hoffman Interlocking/Yard provides a three for one benefit for high speed, commuter and freight rail which will improve the economic competitiveness of the state; and

WHEREAS, the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority will be submitting federal funding requests for The Union Depot Multimodal Hub for property acquisition, engineering, and construction and for Hoffman Interlocking/Yard for environmental and engineering work; and

WHEREAS, without improvements to The Union Depot and Hoffman Interlocking/Yard, high speed rail to Chicago will be delayed.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Commission supports the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority's federal funding requests for The Union Depot Multi-modal Hub and for Hoffman Interlocking/Yard.

7. DRAFT STATE RAIL PLAN COMMENTS

Mr. Rogers informed the Commission that comments were submitted congratulating Mn/DOT on their completion of the on the plan and identifying the concerns of the Commission. He noted that the letter sent to Mn/DOT with the comments was sent to Commission members as well. Discussion ensued on the comments with Commissioners noting the need to talk about the environmental benefits of rail and how rail improvements can reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled on roadways lessening wear and tear on them.

Mr. Faella noted that the La Crosse Area Planning Committee had seen the Commission's comments and concurred on them particularly with regard to how costs were distributed. He noted that for river crossings, Wisconsin would share a portion of the cost reducing the cost to Minnesota.

Commissioner Peterson suggested that members write letters to the editor on the importance of the River Route and why community support is needed. She offered to provide the Commission with a copy of the letter to the editor that she had published for them to use.

8. MINNESOTA STATE RAIL PLAN UPDATE

Ms. Pidarthi provided the Commission with an update on the State Rail Plan and Mn/DOT's plan for moving forward. She said the State Rail Plan comment period had closed and that Mn/DOT was incorporating comments as needed. She provided a handout that covered the

general themes of the comments. The next step is to finalize the plan and get it off to the Commissioner and Legislature for their adoption.

Ms. Pidaparathi noted the receipt of \$600,000 in federal funds for the high level environmental study and alternatives analysis on the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor. This funding will be matched by \$600,000 from Minnesota and Wisconsin bringing the study total to \$1.2 million. She noted that the RFP for the work was in draft form and was being reviewed at the FRA. Mn/DOT anticipated releasing the RFP in late spring so the study could be completed by the end of 2010. She went on to highlight that the Midwest Regional Rail System received approximately \$2.6 billion of the \$8 billion available in this round of funding which showed the federal commitment to the Midwest's high speed rail plans.

She added that there will be a second round of FRA grants coming up and that Mn/Dot would be exploring which projects to submit for funding. However, no firm timelines had yet been set for when FRA would release the grant solicitation.

9. ONBOARD MIDWEST EX-OFFICIO MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Egan introduced himself and made a request that Onboard Midwest, a coalition of individuals, businesses, and elected officials who support high speed rail between St. Paul and Chicago along the river route would like to become an ex-officio non-voting member of the Commission. Discussion ensued about the importance of adding ex-officio members and how OnBoard Midwest continues to play a key role in advocating for the Corridor.

A motion to approve the addition of OnBoard Midwest as an Ex-officio non-voting member of the Commission was made by Commissioner Pomeroy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Peterson and passed unanimously.

10. ONBOARD MIDWEST UPDATE

Mr. Egan thanked the Commission for their approval of ex-officio membership for OnBoard Midwest. He noted that OnBoard Midwest has been spending time at the Capitol lately with members of the House and Senate Bonding Committees to keep them up-to-date on the River Route.

He noted that OnBoard Midwest is working on adding members and additional public relations and video opportunities.

11. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Mr. Rogers provided a brief update of website use noting that visitors to the site are consistent with expectations and that those who are visiting are looking at multiple pages and staying for a significant amount of time.

He updated the Commission on the status of the Strategic Communications Plan noting that a draft would be completed and distributed in March.

12. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Mr. Gitzlaff directed the Commission members to the memo provided in their packet. He walked through the memo and noted important upcoming federal request dates and changes to

the Cost Effectiveness Index. He went on to discuss the prospects for the passage of the six year transportation bill that has been continually extended since its expiration on September 30, 2009. Given the focus on health care and jobs bills, it is unlikely that action will be taken on a full six-year authorization until after the November elections.

13. JOINT MEETING WITH EMPIRE BUILDER COALITION

Mr. Faella and provided an update on the meeting to the Commission. He said that the meeting would be on March 18th and start at 11:30 a.m.. With the inclusion of WisDOT Secretary of Transportation Frank Busalacchi and the invitation to Mn/DOT Commissioner Tom Sorel, the event has become more of a media event. The event's details and agenda are still being confirmed.

Commission members discussed the importance of the event and potential transportation arrangements. Mayor Howe offered to check into bus service that would bring people from La Crosse to Red Wing for those wishing to ride the train to the meeting. Staff was asked to provide this information to Commissioners once it was available

14. OTHER

a. NEXT MEETING – MARCH 18, 2010

Being there was no further discussion the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m..