Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA)

STAFF REPORT ON
FREIGHT RAIL RELOCATION

August 16, 2011
The origin of the current freight rail issue in St. Louis Park & Minneapolis was the severing of the freight rail line in the 29th Street/Midtown Corridor in the 1990’s.
1. TCWR Freight Rail Realignment Study, TKDA, 2009
2. Evaluation of TCWR Routing Alternatives, Amphar Consulting, 2010
3. Analysis of Freight Rail/LRT Coexistence, R L Banks, 2010
4. Freight Rail & LRT Coexistence, HDR Engineering, 2009
5. Freight Rail Technical Memoranda: to the City of St. Louis Park, S.E.H., 2011
6. MN&S Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW), to MN Dept of Transportation (MnDOT), Kimley-Horn & Associates 2011
Evaluated 6 potential routes for rail service between southern/western suburbs & St. Paul

Kenilworth Corridor – retain freight rail service in the active Kenilworth Corridor

Midtown Corridor – reinstate freight rail service in the Midtown Corridor

MN&S Line – relocate freight rail service to the active MN&S Line

Chaska Cut-off – reinstate freight rail service via Chaska

Highway 169 – reinstate freight rail service along the Highway 169 Corridor

Western Connector – reroute freight rail service to the active Western Connector
Twin Cities & Western Freight Rail Realignment Study
Alternative Routes

Legend
- MNS Sub Alignment
- Chaska Cutoff Alignment
- Former Railroad Alignment - Hwy 169
- Midtown Alignment
- Kenilworth Alignment
- Railroad Corridors (not all have tracks)
Findings/Conclusions:

MN&S recommended with appropriate mitigation for impacts

Rationale:

- MN&S is an active freight rail line
- Required freight rail agreements exist
- Few permits required
- Provides flexibility for future freight rail operations
- Relatively low cost
Evaluation of TCWR Routing Alternatives, Amphar Consulting, 2010

In-depth analysis of 4 alternative routes for TCW operations in response to St. Louis Park Council resolution 10-071

Midtown Corridor – reinstate freight rail service in the Midtown Corridor

Chaska Cut-off – reinstate freight rail service via Chaska

Highway 169 – reinstate freight rail service along the Highway 169 Corridor

Western Connector – reroute freight rail service to the active Western Connector
Findings/Conclusions:

None of the four routes would be a viable permanent location for freight rail service between southern/western suburbs & St. Paul

Rationale:

- Negative impacts on freight rail operations
- High capital costs
- Significant acquisitions/displacements
- Requirement for lengthy segments of new track construction
- Challenges to secure necessary permits & agreements
Analysis of the viability of coexistence of freight rail, light rail & commuter bike trail

- Freight rail, LRT & Trail at-grade
- Freight rail & LRT at-grade, trail relocated
- Freight rail & LRT at-grade, trail elevated
- Freight rail & trail at-grade, LRT elevated
- Freight rail & trail at-grade, trail in tunnel
- Freight rail & LRT share single track, trail at-grade
- Freight rail, LRT (Single track) & trail at-grade
Findings/conclusions:

None of the alternatives were considered to be viable.

Rationale:

- Adverse transportation system impacts
- Adverse community impacts
- Significant number of required acquisitions/displacements
- Challenges to secure required permits, agreements & approvals
Supplemental analysis of co-location of freight rail & LRT, TKDA & HDR, 2009

In response to St. Louis Park staff request, further analysis of freight rail & LRT co-location potential in the Kenilworth corridor to further inform policy makers & the public

Findings/conclusions:

TKDA concluded that coexistence of the freight rail & LRT lines would require acquisitions in excess of $100 million & potential additional crossing of freight rail & LRT, concluding that co-location is not viable in the Kenilworth corridor

HDR concluded that due to space constraints & required property acquisitions it was not viable for freight rail, light rail & the commuter bike trail to coexist in Kenilworth corridor
S.E.H. Analysis, 2011, conducted for the City of St. Louis Park

Reviewed & analyzed previously conducted freight rail studies for the City Council

Focused on 4 alternatives or scenarios:

- Kenilworth: co-location of freight rail, LRT & trail
- Kenilworth: co-location of freight rail & LRT with the trail moved
- Western connector: Utilizing freight rate subsidies for TCW to operate on routes west of the metropolitan area
- MN&S
S.E.H. Analysis, 2011, conducted for the City of St. Louis Park

Findings/conclusions:

- The western connector was found to be infeasible - it would add substantially to the operating costs for TCW & would limit TCW’s ability to transport grain to the port in Savage

- The western connector was found to be potentially viable for coal trains only
Co-location of freight rail & LRT in the Kenilworth corridor – issues needing resolution:

- Parkland impacts
- LRT interface,
- Highway 100 crossing,
- Trail alignment,
- Southwest LRT DEIS,
- Land acquisition requirements,
- LRT station impacts &
- Midtown streetcar/connector impacts.
S.E.H. Analysis, 2011, conducted for the City of St. Louis Park

Comparisons between MN&S & Kenilworth:

- Grade Change
- Curves
- Right-of-Way (ROW)
- At-grade crossings
- Housing / Land Use
- Wooddale and Beltline Station
The EAW was prepared to assist the state (MnDOT) in determining if there are significant impacts of re-routing freight rail from Kenilworth to MN&S that require the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS).
EAW identified multiple mitigation measures to address noise, vibration & safety impacts that would be included in the MSN project.

Also states that “The HCRRA will work with the City of St. Louis Park & project stakeholders to review & evaluate feasible & prudent mitigation measures … that go beyond the mitigation measures committed to … in this EAW…”
MnDOT Determination:

- “that the proposed action does not have the potential for significant environmental impact.”
- Environmental Impact Statement is not required.
HCRRA Staff Analysis & Conclusion

Analysis focused on four areas:

- Freight rail operations & neighborhood improvements
- Transportation System Impacts/Benefits
- Economic Development/Transit Oriented Development (TOD)
- Southwest LRT Project
Staff evaluation & conclusion reflects a preponderance of considerations rather than reliance on one or two factors such as engineering or cost.

The most viable & therefore preferred route for freight rail is the MN&S line in St. Louis Park & the preferred location for LRT is in the Kenilworth corridor along with the Kenilworth Bike Trail - absent freight rail.
Copies of the draft staff report & presentation available at:

http://www.hennepin.us/freightrail