



Minnesota High-Speed Rail Commission Press Release

Contact:

MN High-Speed Rail Commission
(651) 266-2790
Kevin.roggenbuck@co.ramsey.mn.us

For immediate release: January 22, 2015

MnDOT Study Calls for At-Grade Rail Crossing Improvements

State funding to support improvements along Mississippi River Route

Saint Paul, Minn. (January 22, 2015) –The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) recently released its study on Improvements to Highway-Rail Grade Crossings and Rail Safety with recommended safety upgrades to dozens of highway-rail grade crossings throughout the state including several along the proposed Minnesota High-Speed Rail River Route.

“We are very excited for these improvements to be made,” said Janice Rettman, chair of the Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission. “Communities along the River Route have been consistently advocating for at-grade rail crossing improvements. If they are completed, they will benefit existing and future passenger rail service, as well as provide for improved safety for residents, the communities and motorists along the River Route.”

The 2014 Minnesota legislature called for the MnDOT study to address concerns about highway-rail grade crossings and the safety improvements needed to ensure trains carrying hazardous material such as crude oil from the Bakken oil fields, safely reach their destinations while assuring the safety of the state’s citizens. The study identified more than 700 miles of train routes that carry the Bakken crude oil across Minnesota to refineries on the East and Gulf coasts. These routes have 683 at-grade crossings of roads and railroads. Each grade crossing has the potential risk of a train and vehicle collision, or a train derailment.

The legislature appropriated \$2 million for implementation of safety improvements at these grade crossings along crude-by-rail corridors. The appropriation is expected to fund the installation of 10 lower-cost grade crossing improvements to existing at-grade crossings and enhance collision avoidance systems on rail corridors shipping crude oil. Following the release of the preliminary safety recommendations in October MnDOT solicited feedback from each community on whether the proposed safety improvements met community needs and expectations.

The MnDOT study recommends a number of safety improvements for several grade crossings along the Mississippi River Route (railway connecting the Twin Cities to Chicago) in Winona and Red Wing, and

one in Wabasha. Other improvements call for a Crossing Closure (closing the road that crosses the railroad tracks) in Saint Paul Park; installing an Active Warning Device upgrade (medians to prevent traffic from driving around lowered gates) in Winona; and a signing upgrade (replacing missing, deteriorated or insufficient signing) along the Canadian Pacific Corridor.

“It is likely that these improvements would have been recommended as part of project work for the Minnesota High-Speed Rail Project,” Rettman added. “The Commission will continue to advocate for incremental improvements to the line.”

The study focused on the transportation of Bakken crude oil by train since the volume far exceeds any other flammable or hazardous material being transported through Minnesota. The recommended improvements to grade crossings cover some of the most heavily trafficked railroad mainlines in the state. The transport of crude oil accounts for significant new rail business, which increased from almost no rail transport in 2005 to nine fully loaded crude oil trains originating from North Dakota in 2014. Five to seven of those trains cross Minnesota each day, destined for refineries on the East Coast and Gulf Coast.

See the full MnDOT report <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/govrel/reports/2014/CBRCrossingStudy-December2014/ReportonHwy-RailXingsandRailSafety-2014.pdf>

Appendix B “At-Grade Crossing Safety Improvement Recommendations”:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/govrel/reports/2014/CBRCrossingStudy-December2014/AppendixB-AtGradeCrossingImprovementRecommendations.pdf>

Appendix D “Top Priority Grade Crossings”:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/govrel/reports/2014/CBRCrossingStudy-December2014/AppendixB-AtGradeCrossingImprovementRecommendations.pdf>

###

About the Minnesota High-Speed Rail Commission

The Minnesota High-Speed Rail Commission is one of the leading authoritative voices on high-speed rail in Minnesota. Comprised of elected officials from 16 local governments, the commission advocates for the development of Minnesota’s first high-speed rail line within the federally designated high-speed rail corridor that connects the Twin Cities to Milwaukee and Chicago. The commission is a strong proponent of bringing high-speed rail to the Midwest through the scenic upper Mississippi River valley. For more information visit <http://www.mnhighspeedrail.com/index.php>.