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Office of Proceedings
April 25, 2018
Part of
Public Record

April 17, 2018

Ms. Cynthia T. Brown
Chief, Section of Administration
Surface Transportation Board
Office of Proceedings
395 E Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-001

Re: Docket No. FD 36178, Metropolitan Council -Petition for Declaratory Order
Docket No. FD 36177, Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority -Acquisition
Exemption – In Hennepin County, Minnesota

LETTER IN SUPPORT OF TWIN CITIES & WESTERN RAILROAD COMPANY'S
INITIAL REPLY REQUESTING THE BOARD TO SET A PROCEDURAL
SCHEDULE

Dear Ms. Brown:

Sibley County urges the Board to set a procedural schedule in the above referenced proceeding (FD 36178) to permit public comment and a full hearing on Metropolitan Council's Petition seeking to acquire ownership of the Bass Lake and Kenilworth corridors in Hennepin County, Minnesota. We also respectfully request that the Board stay the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority's ("HCRRA") request in FD 36177 to acquire the common carrier obligations for the line.

Sibley County is an agricultural county located in southwestern MN. For over 27 years, Sibley County businesses have relied on Twin Cities & Western Railroad Company ("TCW") for efficient and effective rail access to the Twin Cities to connect with major Class I carriers such as BNSF, a route that includes the Bass Lake/Kenilworth corridor. In 2017 Sibley County produced over 28.5 million bushels of corn and 6.5 million bushels of soybeans that were then transported over this route. There is also over 100 million gallons of ethanol produced in the County and we have the largest egg producer in the state, both of which transport on this line. In addition, there are new facilities being proposed and built in our county based on the availability of this rail access, resulting in an even greater demand placed on this rail line. There is no other economically viable rail route for our county's products to move to and from the Twin Cities rail terminal. In total, there were over 6,800 rail cars shipped last year on this line.

Several years ago, TCW informed us that the Metropolitan Council was seeking to expand its light rail service from Minneapolis west to certain suburban communities. When it was determined that the Metropolitan Council had selected the Bass Lake/Kenilworth corridor for a joint light rail /freight rail corridor, TCW committed that it would work with the Council to reach agreements both to minimize disruption to freight rail service during construction and thereafter to assure that the presence of light rail in the freight rail corridor would not negatively impact TC&W's operational and economic ability to provide service or force shippers to subsidize the expense of adding light rail to the corridor.

We understand the Metropolitan Council recently abruptly ended negotiations with TCW and has filed its present Petition asking the Board to approve an arrangement whereby the Council will acquire ownership of the rail line but will ask the Board to transfer the common carrier obligation to HCRRA. This is a very complicated transaction that needs full public input and understanding. Neither the Council nor the HCRRA has ever sought our input on freight rail needs on the corridor, and we now have learned they have no agreements in place with TCW on how freight service will be handled on this proposed "shared corridor" route.

We urge the Board to set a procedural schedule and delay HCRRA's request to acquire the common carrier obligation in order to solicit the views of others affected by this transaction – in particular shippers who need this vital rail route to move goods through the Twin Cities. Entrusting the common carrier obligation to a public entity that does not operate freight rail service provides little assurance that important shipper interests in continued effective transportation service will be protected. In addition, deciding on this matter without reaching an agreement with the one entity that is currently and effectively providing the common carrier service, TCW, is a matter of significant concern and warrants close scrutiny by the Board.

Respectfully submitted,


Jim Swanson, Chairman
Joy Colver
Gary Kuegel
B. Hansen

Sibley County Board of Commissioners

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Gaylord, MN 55334
Cc: Parties of Record