

April 16, 2018

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Ms. Cynthia T. Brown
Chief, Section of Administration
Surface Transportation Board
Office of Proceedings
395 E Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
April 18, 2018
Part of
Public Record

**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:

The Minnesota AgriGrowth Council ("AgriGrowth") 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. AgriGrowth further requests the Board stay the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority's ("HCRRA") request in FD 36177 to acquire the common carrier obligations for the line.

AgriGrowth is a nonprofit, nonpartisan member organization which advocates for Minnesota's agriculture and food sector. Located in Saint Paul, MN, AgriGrowth's industry-wide perspective is essential in a state where the agriculture and food sector are the second largest economic driver. Many of our members are growers and processors of corn, soybeans, wheat, and other commodities and farm inputs that have relied on the 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. There is no other economically viable rail route for our commodities and farm inputs to move to and from the Twin Cities rail terminal.

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 Metropolitan 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, such as the state's agricultural industry, to subsidize the expense of adding light rail to the corridor.

AgriGrowth is disappointed that 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 HCRRA has ever sought our input on freight rail needs on the corridor and AgriGrowth has learned they have no agreements in place with TCW on how freight service will be handled on this proposed "shared corridor" route.

AgriGrowth strongly urges 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 the agricultural sector who rely on this vital rail route to move our 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,



Perry Aasness
Executive Director
Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

Cc: Parties of Record

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