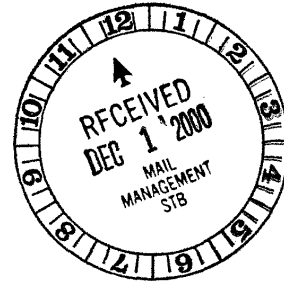


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001615

Jeffrey G. Carlstrom
355 Doc Jones Road
Mankato, Minnesota 56001



November 15, 2000

Office of the Secretary
Case Control Unit
STB Finance Docket No. 33407
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K. Street NW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

**ENVIRONMENTAL
DOCUMENT**

RE: Letter in Support of the Draft EIS, DM & E Powder River Basin Rebuild Project.

My name is Jeff Carlstrom and I reside at 355 Doc Jones Road in the city of Mankato, MN 56001.

I support the DM & E Powder River Basin Rebuild Proposal and urge the Surface Transportation Board to approve this important project. I believe the DEIS successfully addresses the issues pertinent to rebuilding and expanding this railroad.

I do not believe an extension of the 90 day comment period is warranted and I urge the Board to proceed on schedule.

Attached please find an article that I wrote for the Mankato Free Press. The article was published unedited on October 6, 2000. I believe this article explains my views towards railroad transportation in the United States and towards the DM & E Project in particular.

Thank you for your consideration of this document.

Jeffrey G. Carlstrom

A New DM & E Railroad Will Benefit All Minnesotans

By Jeff Carlstrom

Published in the Mankato Free Press on October 6, 2000

Just mention the DM & E coal trains while visiting with any of the residents of the neighborhood's bordering the railroad's cross-town tracks in cities like Rochester or Mankato and you're likely to get an earful of talk about coal dust, diesel exhaust and ear piercing locomotive noises. Some of the residents living in these neighborhoods have expressed outrage that a railroad they chose to move next to should choose to revitalize its antiquated infrastructure in an effort to grow its business. Many have banded together to actively oppose the project.

By all appearances the broader public has embraced the cause of property owners faced with the understandably difficult prospect of living next to a rejuvenated railroad - and one certain to see sizable traffic increases. I recently spotted a "No Coal Trains" sign near St. Peter, Minnesota, a full 10 miles from a DM & E track. Apparently no one wants a busy railroad in *anyone's* back yard. The problem is no one wants a busy highway in theirs, or anyone's back yard either and therein lies an interesting dilemma for all of us to contemplate.

As our economy continues to grow we will continue to experience an increase in the number of cars and trucks clogging our streets and highways. Since 1960 the United States has seen a 95% increase in the number of paved public road miles built; meanwhile the volume of traffic on these same roads has rocketed over 300%. The motor carrier population, (trucks), expanded from 190,000 carriers in 1989 to 425,000 in 1998. The Federal Highway Administration recently reported that truck travel is increasing at more than double the rate of passenger cars. As our Nation's transportation infrastructure continues to strain under a seemingly unstoppable increase in the number of cars and trucks entering onto our roads and highways each year, much of our nation's rail infrastructure continues to languish in a state of disrepair or under use.

Given these statistics it's hard to imagine how improving the DM & E track, or any railroad for that matter, could work to the detriment of the vast majority of Minnesotans, especially those who drive automobiles. One rail car holds the equivalent of three and a half semi trailers. A unit train of 50 cars effectively removes 175 semi tractor trailers from our nation's highways. As our economy continues to rumble along we will begin to see shortages of certain commodities and bulk products required by population centers and best handled by railroads. For example, it is currently anticipated that sand and gravel shortages in place like the seven county metro and Rochester will drive the need for massive movements of these products from out state quarries to our cities. It's estimated in fact that with the depleting metro area aggregate reserves it will take 12,000 additional truck trips per day into the Twin Cities along the major Interstate and Trunk Highway corridors of I-35, I-94, I-494, TH-10, TH-52 and TH-243 to serve existing concrete and asphalt plants. This contrasts with just over 16,000 total truck trips, (hauling everything and anything), per day currently traveling into the metro on these same corridors. Trucks won't do it alone; and our tax dollars would never keep up with the repair and maintenance that would be required on these highways due to the heavy traffic. Railroads, unlike paved roads, are financed entirely with private funds; the DM & E upgrade is no exception. Imagine a private trucking company paying to upgrade U.S. Trunk Highway 14.

It's interesting too that environmental concerns are so frequently cited by opponents of the proposed upgrade. One needs to take a broad view when considering the impacts to the environment caused by railroads. Consider that railroad locomotives burn less than a third of the fuel that trucks consume to haul the same tonnage of freight while at the same time emitting about a third of the combustion by-products. Trucks' use, (and cause to be discarded), rubber tires - trains don't.

The DM & E has recently received Federal Surface Transportation Board approval to upgrade their existing railroad tracks from Western South Dakota to Winona, Minnesota. In addition the DM & E has plans to build 260 miles of new track out to the Wyoming coal fields. The approval is tentative pending exhaustive environmental reviews by the Federal Government. The upgrade would significantly increase the freight carrying capacity of this railroad resulting in a vastly improved capability to move coal as well as agricultural products, building materials and other commodities to end users on their own line and to connections with other common carriers in places like Mankato, Owatonna and Winona.

The upgrade would be immensely beneficial to existing on-line shippers as well. Currently operating speeds on the DM & E remain below industry averages due to the floundering condition of its tracks. With increased speed come increased freight carrying capacity. The DM & E provides service to a wide range of customers system wide and processes over 60,000 car loadings each year. Without this rail connection Minnesota alone could see an estimated 200,000 more trucks on the paved corridors of Interstate I-90, U.S. Trunk Highway 14 and other similar east-west routes. The DM & E parallels Highway 14 for much of its 1,100 miles and many of its customers enjoy the flexibility of choosing to use trucks if rail proves too inefficient or costly.

The DM & E rebuild proposal, mired in controversy over trackside quality-of-life issues, should be examined in a broader context. The potential for railroads, including this one, to help us as a State and as a Nation to ease the burden of our increasingly overextended roads and highways will become more apparent as gridlock worsens. Railroads are due for a comeback and make no mistake we will *all* benefit from their eventual resurgence.

End of Opinion Piece.