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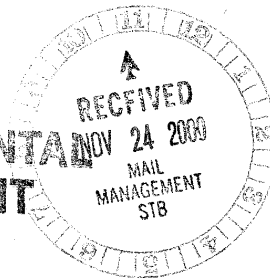
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Office of the Secretary
Case Control Unit
STB Finance Docket No. 33407
Surface Transportation Board
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Washington DC 20423-0001

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Ms. Rutson and Staff members;

Thank you for this opportunity to make these comments today and thank you for the work and effort you put into the Draft EIS that is before us. We know it was a big job and I would like to compliment you on this draft.

I am a resident of the City of Eyota, the next City east of Rochester and on the DM&E line. I was a member of the Traffic and Safety sub-committee of the Rochester/Olmsted Co. DM&E task force. I also was a member of the committee that represented the City of Eyota that negotiated our Community Agreement with the DM&E. During the process of formulating community agreements, I also had the opportunity to join the Cities of Lewiston and Kasson for some of their work. I would like to commend the DM&E and Mr. Schieffer for their willingness to work with the affected communities. It was a good process, which for the most part, worked very well.

The City of Eyota has one of the very few sidetracks on the present DM&E system where trains can pass each other. Because of this, we routinely get trains that are slowing, stopping, and backing up. This causes long waits for vehicular traffic on Center St., County Road 7, and Hwy. 14. With the proposed railroad upgrade and as agreed upon in our community agreement, this siding system and the traffic congestion it creates would be eliminated. I would also like to note that our crossings in Eyota are routinely slowed and delayed as train cars loaded with coal are sided, stored, and then picked up to be brought into Rochester for the City's coal-fired electrical generating plant. As a good neighbor, our City and it's residents have not complained about the inconvenience of Rochester's coal shipments.

The reason that we have many of the concerns that were brought forth today is because the Rochester governmental representatives and leaders have failed in their responsibility to this community. They have had the opportunity to negotiate and begin to agree to mitigate these concerns with the DM&E but they have continually shunned that opportunity while ridiculing Mr. Schieffer and the DM&E and treating them like villains.

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Rochester and Olmsted County leaders and administration could have been negotiating for some grade separations, a link with the railroads communication system for the law enforcement center dispatch, and how to best address other concerns of the community. But rather they have been, in my view, shortsighted and selfish.

With so much being said about how this upgrade would affect emergency medical response in the City of Rochester, I think it is important to note that a supervisor for Gold Cross ambulance personally told me that even though the upgrade would cause them to make some adjustments, they would serve the community with the same top-notch service that they always have. He also said they would not join in the fear causing rhetoric that is going on. Also, at a meeting in February of 1998, some top officials from the Minn. Dept. of Transportation stated that the DM&E was one of the best railroads in the state to work with on traffic and crossing projects. These are only two instances that are contrary to the continual fear inducing propaganda that we so often hear.

Finally, this is a project that makes sense and as one who grew up within literally a stones throw from the mainline of the BNSF Railroad with 45 to 60 trains per day, many being unit coal trains, I believe with all my heart that the concerns that we heard today can be safely mitigated. This proposed project would provide a tremendous piece of transportation infrastructure that would benefit all of us. For many good reasons the best place for the upgrade in this area is on the present railroad corridor. While discouraging any further extension of 90 day comment period for the DEIS, I urge you to permit this proposal to become a reality. Thank you.

Gerry Bermel

Gerry Bermel
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