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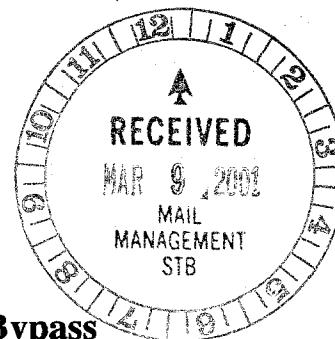
March 4, 2001

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Approve the DM&E Plan, but without a Rochester Bypass

Community leaders, carefully orchestrated and financed by city/county government, the Mayo Clinic, and the Rochester Post Bulletin (newspaper), oppose the idea of coal trains passing through the city, and make a variety of claims against it.

In this letter, I challenge their methods and conclusions.

I have enthusiastically supported the DM&E proposal from its initial announcement, and am completely disgusted (but not at all surprised) by Rochester's self-centered and close-minded stance against the project. This town, with a huge ego, thinks too highly of itself.

I came to Rochester in 1968, hired as an engineer by IBM. Since that time, I have observed the city's behavior during several significant issues – the Flood Control project, bringing the Federal Medical Center (prison) to town, and repeated authorizations for the local sales tax, to name a few.

Railroads and Power Generation are closely related, necessary infrastructures

As the California power shortage has recently demonstrated, reliable and affordable electricity is crucial to a region's economy. This applies to the Midwest just as it does to the rest of the country, and studies¹ show that Minnesota will also need several additional power plants in the next few years. Nuclear power is unpopular these days; wind and solar sources do not approach the scale of a traditional large plant; fuel oil needs to be directed to vehicles; natural gas and propane best serves agricultural, industrial, and point-of-use heating needs. That leaves COAL as the most appropriate fuel source for electrical power generation, now and for the foreseeable future.

Mayo Clinic needs Coal

Though Mayo Clinic is leading the opposition to the rail expansion, it uses tremendous amounts of energy to heat, cool, and light its many large buildings, skyways, and pedestrian subways, and to power its equipment. Almost all the electricity for Mayo, the city, and surrounding area comes from coal-fired power plants, either locally or nearby. As I write this letter, a long line of filled coal cars sits on a DM&E siding in western Rochester, awaiting delivery to the city-owned electric plant located along the rail tracks a few blocks north of the Clinic complex (and last week a similar line of tanker cards was lined up near the city's oil-fired "peaking" plant).

¹ various reports, including "State faces electricity shortages" (Rochester Post-Bulletin, page 1A, 1/2/01), and "All agree on necessity of building new power plants" (Rochester Post-Bulletin, page 1A, 1/27/01).

With Mayo's vocal opposition to the rail expansion, it is especially ironic that at this point in their anti-rail campaign, they have requested² the city of Rochester to develop means to heat Mayo buildings with steam from the local (coal-fired) power plant.

Vibrations

Mayo expresses a great deal of concern regarding vibration from the increased rail traffic. They ignore the fact that the Clinic was apparently able to handle vibration caused during construction over the past 10 -15 years of several large (10 – 20 story) buildings on the blocks immediately adjacent to the Clinic facility. These projects have included large excavations in very rocky ground, and the use of pile drivers for weeks at a time to set the foundations for these buildings.

Local news articles published for the anti-coal campaign referen to other local businesses sensitive to vibration, and correctly identify Pemstar's high-tech facility³ along the DM&E tracks. But the articles fail to mention the company's main and expanding facility on a large tract of land several miles to the north.

I have worked for Pemstar at the railroad-adjacent facility since late 1995. We notice the vibrations as several trains a day pass by, but I have never heard a co-worker mention problems caused by them. Certainly, as the company's projects evolve into ever-higher levels of sophistication, we may become more susceptible to their effects, but I accept that the rebuilt track bed and welded rails described in the DM&E proposal will adequately address the issue.

My comfort with the rebuilt line is substantiated by a study reported in a half-page news story⁴ subtitled "experts differ on effects of coal trains." It reports on a 150-hour engineering study carried out by a local retired IBM engineer:

"Reckinger took measurements of train noise alongside three area railroad lines: the DM&E, the Canadian Pacific, and the Soo line. The latter two rail lines are made of welded track, bedded in heavy ballast – similar to what DM&E proposes.

In Reckingers's tests, train noise on the two welded lines recorded as much as 7 decibels lower than DM&E trains, despite the fact that the welded rails carry faster trains."

Although "city leaders ... challenge Reckinger's credentials⁵" I would consider him to be very well qualified. While I have not seen nor spoken with him for many years, I shared an office with Mr Reckinger when I joined IBM. In today's terminology, he was my "mentor" as I transitioned from college to "real world" engineering. He has a Master's degree in electrical engineering from a Missouri school (I believe it was the respected University of Missouri, at Rolla). Given their bias, what are challenger's qualifications to question his abilities? Rather than respond with data to support their position, they simply seek to discredit him – a frequent tactic in this and earlier issues.

² as reported by a 7:00 am radio newscast on KROC-AM, 2/27/01.

³ News article "Rail upgrade could cost area millions" (Rochester Post-Bulletin, page 1A, 2/16/01)

⁴ "Noise, vibration are big concerns" (Rochester Post-Bulletin, page 3A, 3/3/01)

⁵ ibid

In the late 60's and early 70's, our work at IBM involved developing "card-punch" machines – creating the widely-used "IBM cards" of that era. These machines were complex desk-size high-speed electro-mechanical systems; noise (and the vibrations which create it) was of major concern. IBM had a well-staffed and sophisticated acoustical-measurement facility; Mr. Reckinger worked closely with that group to test and quiet the products being developed. He was meticulous in detail with a thorough understanding of the terminology, measurements, and equipment, with the analytical skills to interpret the results, and continued his career with IBM in high-level engineering assignments.

Rochester's concerns are Vastly Overstated

Reading the opposition's publicity, an outside observer may conclude that a vast amount of land along the track is densely populated along its entire run through Rochester. In reality, much of the land near the rail line through the city remains undeveloped or is open space including parkland, cemeteries, and athletic fields. Only a fraction is closely adjacent to commercial, light industrial, or residential property:

- Entering the city from the west, the rail line passes under West Circle Drive (Cty 22 W), then proceeds through vacant lowlands for a half-mile or so to a lumberyard on the right.
- Crossing 7th Street NW, there are light commercial buildings, including the smaller Pemstar facility on the right, and more vacant land to the left.
- Continuing eastward, on the right is a large area of rental storage lockers, vacant land, and a city-owned oil-fired electric peaking plant (with a rail siding that recently held 8 or 10 tanker cars). To the left are additional light commercial buildings.
- The tracks next cross under Highway 52, slated for reconstruction for the next several years. A highway overpass exists here, and can be expanded as necessary during that reconstruction.
- East of Hwy 52, the line passes a warehouse facility, and further to the left, north of 7th Street, a small mobile-home park, then a high-school athletic field. On the right, a highway interchange (Highways 14 and 52).
- Now the rails pass between 2 shopping centers, Barlow Plaza on the right, and the smaller Northgate on the left, before crossing 11th Avenue NW.
- Between 11th Avenue NW and to 6th Avenue NW is Cooke Park on the left, and warehouses, a gas station, and a cement plant on the right.
- From 6th Avenue NW to Broadway, is a region of older residences and small businesses that is gradually being consumed by the northward expansion of the downtown area.
- Between Broadway and Civic Center Drive at Silver Lake, on the left is a large Dairy plant and the city-owned coal-burning power plant, and vacant land on the right.
- Crossing the bridge over Silver Lake, there is a Cemetery on the left, and Mayo Park athletic field on the right, to 7th Avenue NE.
- From 7th Avenue NE to 15th Avenue NE on the right, and 17th Avenue NE on the left, is a sizeable residential area that deserves significant compensation by the railroad.
- On the left, past 17th Avenue, is Quarry Hill Park, a large nature preserve; to the right, past 15th Avenue, is East Park, then the lands of the Federal Medical Center, followed

by vacant land as the tracks approach East Circle Drive (county 22 east), where they exit the "city".

6th Avenue NW to 17th Avenue NE will be most affected from increased rail traffic and deserves appropriate mitigation efforts, but this 23-block length does not justify creation of 34 miles of new Bypass right-of-way outside the city.

Appropriately-placed overpasses, at locations highlighted on a newspaper-article map,⁶ will minimize traffic and safety concerns, and would provide a great improvement over delays imposed by present trains.

- A road underpass at Civic Drive, alongside the west edge of Silver Lake, would be especially straightforward, in that the road presently makes quite a rise to get up to track level.
- A highway overpass on East Circle Drive should have been included when that road was created several years ago (as was done more recently at West Circle drive). Fortunately, land remains available in that area to add one.
- Structures for 11th Avenues NW and NE, and Broadway will require significant investment, for which the city should have been working with the DM&E to finance.

Rochester's campaign: Exaggerations, Deceptions, and Questionable politics

Throughout this issue, the Rochester Post-Bulletin, often appearing to operate as an extension of Mayo's communications department, has fanned the flames of emotion. Exaggeration has been a frequent tool:

- Articles and letters have frequently referred to the "5000-page" Draft EIS, but without mentioning that only Section 3.3.2 (48 pages), is of direct concern to Rochester. Why should this city feel driven to comment on other jurisdictions?
- One cost estimate by the city, reported⁷ in January, suggested \$48 million would be required to mitigate effects of the rail project through Rochester, including up to 5 under/overpasses, sound-barrier walls, and vibration isolators.

Only a few short weeks later, the figure had inflated to \$849.9 million⁸ (a factor of almost 18) and labeled an "economic cost over 10 years." This value included "estimated" costs to city businesses (\$16 million) due to smaller numbers of visitors to the city, etc. According to the article, "Pemstar ... might be forced to relocate part of its operations because of vibrations, costing the city an estimated \$35 million [per year?] in economic activity". (See "Vibrations" on page 2 of this letter: Pemstar's main site in Rochester, where the Company's local expansion would take place, is several miles from the rail tracks).

Creators of this study have made liberal assumptions to create their high number. It's interesting how one can pick arbitrary un-knowable numbers, multiply by an arbitrary duration, then use the result to influence a major decision.

⁶ "Dealing with DM&E could cost the city \$48 million" (Rochester Post Bulletin, page 1B, 1/18/01)

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ "Rail upgrade could cost area millions" (Rochester Post Bulletin, page 1A, 2/16/01)

March 4, 2001

- An exhibit in the local Government Center shows a sample section of a sound-barrier wall, "complete with fake graffiti"⁹. Rochester, as part of its Corps of Engineers flood-control project, has miles of concrete walls along the Zumbro River flowing through the downtown region. These walls seem to have remained graffiti-free over the years, so the exhibition of the sample railway barrier in this manner is highly inappropriate.
- Numbers stating the potential number of trains/day consistently point to the higher end of the range (37) suggested by rail supporters. One letter-to-the-editor published¹⁰ (with no correcting editor's comment) claimed the possibility of 100 trains per day. On what basis? This is vastly more than anything the DM&E has predicted
- State Representative Dave Bishop, for years a key partner in Rochester's political machine, was recently quoted¹¹ "we're not against the project." This is a complete contradiction to the "STOP THE COAL TRAINS" signs liberally placed throughout the city, largely funded by "contributions" from the city treasury¹² of \$50,000 to the opposition organization.
- That funding should itself be questioned: how can a public body legally donate tax money to support one side (but not others) of what is becoming a divisive political issue?

The DM&E expansion will benefit the Upper Midwest; the Bypass is not needed

A healthy rail transportation system is a critical investment in infrastructure for the region, to support another infrastructure, our electric energy source. Good rail lines will also assist shippers of agricultural and other bulk commodities. It will help uphold our economy, and the investment made during its construction will create jobs in construction and rail-equipment industries as well.

On a map of the upper-midwest, Rochester is just one dot among many. Leaders of this prissy little city must not be allowed to block or delay the region-wide DM&E project, and need to understand they're not in Camelot. Rochester, and Mayo, will benefit from this project, must accept the changes it will create, and should begin work to find ways to co-exist with the improved railway.

I urge prompt approval of the DM&E proposal, using existing right-of-way through Rochester.



Doug Lochner
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⁹ "Mitigation of DM&E project in question" (Rochester Post Bulletin, page 4B, 1/18/01)

¹⁰ Letter by Bill Mogen, 1336 Camelback Court NE, Rochester (Rochester Post Bulletin, page 9A, 2/9/01)

¹¹ News article, "DM&E debate provides few answers" (Rochester Post-Bulletin, page 4B, 2/17/01)

¹² "City gives another \$25,000 to anti-coal train organization" (Rochester Post-Bulletin, page 3B, 1/4/01)