

Rochester-Twin Cities

# Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan and Tier 1 EIS



## Final Scoping Decision Document

January 2015





**FINAL SCOPING DECISION DOCUMENT**  
**For**  
**ROCHESTER-TWIN CITIES PASSENGER RAIL CORRIDOR INVESTMENT PLAN**  
**AND TIER 1 EIS**  
**(ZIP RAIL)**

Minnesota Department of Transportation  
St. Paul, Minnesota

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**RGU CERTIFICATION:**


**I hereby certify that:**

- The information contained in this document is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge;
- This document describes the complete project; there are no other projects, stages or components other than those described in this document, which are related to the project as connected actions or phased actions, as defined at Minnesota Rules, parts 4410.0200, subparts 9c and 60, respectively;
- Copies of this document are being sent to the entire EQB distribution list.

1/7/15  
Date

  
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Dan Krom  
Director, Passenger Rail Office  
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1/8/2015  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

This Final Scoping Decision Document (FSDD) for the Rochester – Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor Project (Zip Rail) Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared as part of the state environmental review process (Minnesota Environmental Policy Act, MEPA) to fulfill requirements of Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410.2000. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) sponsoring the project, in cooperation with the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority (OCRRA). The Draft Scoping Decision Document (DSDD), considered as preliminary and subject to revision based on the entire record of the scoping process, was distributed to federal, state, and local agencies and the public on July 7, 2014 to provide an opportunity for review and comment prior to the preparation of this document. The DSDD was distributed for public review at government offices and public libraries throughout the study area.

The public comment period began when the availability notice for the DSDD was published in the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) *Monitor* (as required by Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410.2100 Subpart 3). The public comment period was between July 7, 2014 and August 22, 2014 and provided an opportunity for agencies and the public to comment on the DSDD. In addition, a series of three Scoping Meetings were held on the following dates:

- Tuesday, July 29, 2014 in Rochester
- Wednesday, July 30, 2014 in Inver Grove Heights
- Thursday, July 31, 2014 in Kenyon

More information about these outreach efforts, including locations where the DSDD was available for review, can be found in Appendix A: Summary of Public Outreach Activities for Scoping and Scoping Comments.

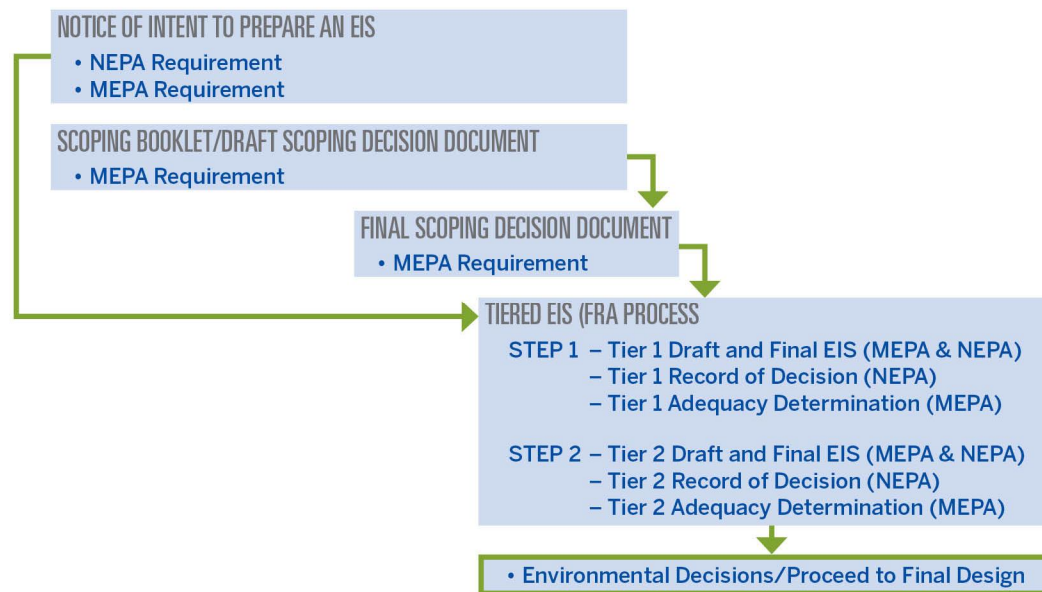
This FSDD describes the purpose of and need for the proposed action; the development and evaluation of corridor alternatives; the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts and discussion of the methodology that will be used to address each issue in the Tier 1 EIS; and responds to comments received during the public comment period. The FSDD has been prepared to meet state environmental requirements and to guide the preparation of the Tier 1 EIS in accordance with federal regulations.

## **COORDINATION WITH THE FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS**

Federal funding may be pursued for this project from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). As a result the FRA, as the lead federal agency for this project, is required to undertake environmental review in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in compliance with FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 Federal Register 28545 (May 26, 1999) and the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) NEPA implementing regulation (40 CFR 1500-08). The FRA, MnDOT, and OCRRA have determined that the Zip Rail project may have significant environmental impacts and will develop an environmental impact

statement. Figure 1 illustrates the various steps and sequencing of the combined MEPA (state) and NEPA (federal) environmental processes.

**Figure 1. MEPA and NEPA Environmental Review Process Sequencing**



For passenger rail projects that seek federal funding, FRA has established prescriptive processes to ensure compliance, known as Service Development Programs. Service Development Programs are carried out through development of a Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan (PRCIP) that is comprised of two components: an environmental analysis (the tiered EIS process for this project), and a Service Development Plan (SDP). Together, the tiered EIS process and SDP complete the PRCIP, which would provide sufficient information to support a potential FRA decision to fund and implement a major investment in the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor.

The FRA uses a tiered EIS process for its NEPA studies that reflects that the scale and scope of most rail projects are typically very large. As a result, it is more practical to conduct a two-step environmental review. Step 1 (Tier 1) assesses impacts to the corridor as a whole for the purpose of identifying a preferred corridor. Tier 1 compares the Build alternatives to the No-Build alternative; should the No-Build alternative be selected, no further project development would occur. Should a Build alternative be selected, Step 2 (Tier 2) would examine site-specific impacts to the preferred corridor, and information would be developed to identify the specific track alignment within the preferred corridor.

The SDP and Tier 1 EIS phase of the project have been initiated by MnDOT and OCRRA. This planning phase will evaluate potential rail service corridor alternatives between the termini, identify a preferred alternative, assess ridership, evaluate project costs and revenues, conduct

public information and outreach, and prepare the Tier 1 EIS. In Tier 1, environmental analyses are completed at a more general level where existing information is compiled for corridors and used for comparison purposes. The Tier 2 EIS<sup>1</sup> analyzes site-specific information supported by field studies after a preferred corridor and related service information have been determined. In Tier 2, detailed environmental impacts and mitigation strategies would be determined for the preferred corridor, specifically for the identified alignment.

As shown in Figure 1, the completion of the Tier 1 EIS would result in a Record of Decision (ROD) prepared by the FRA, identifying their support of a Build alternative or a No-Build alternative. Should the ROD indicate a Build alternative, the Tier 2 work would proceed. Under the state regulations, MnDOT would issue an Adequacy Determination on the EIS document to complete the state environmental process.

## **RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENTAL UNIT AND PROJECT MANAGER**

MnDOT is the project proposer and Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) under Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410.0500 for the purposes of this FSDD, and for the Tier 1 EIS, with respect to State environmental review requirements.

MnDOT Project Manager:

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## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor Project (Zip Rail) is a proposed high-speed passenger rail connection between Rochester, Minnesota and the Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Area (Twin Cities). The project study area is located in the counties of Dakota, Dodge, Goodhue, Hennepin, Olmsted, Ramsey and Rice (see Figures 2 and 3).

Proposed termini include downtown Rochester at the south end of the approximately 100-mile corridor, with Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) and/or St. Paul Union Depot at the north end of the corridor. At the north end of the corridor, Zip Rail could also connect to the existing light rail transit in the vicinity of MSP (Metro Blue Line) and/or the existing light rail transit at Union Depot (Metro Green Line) or to other transit and ground transportation options.

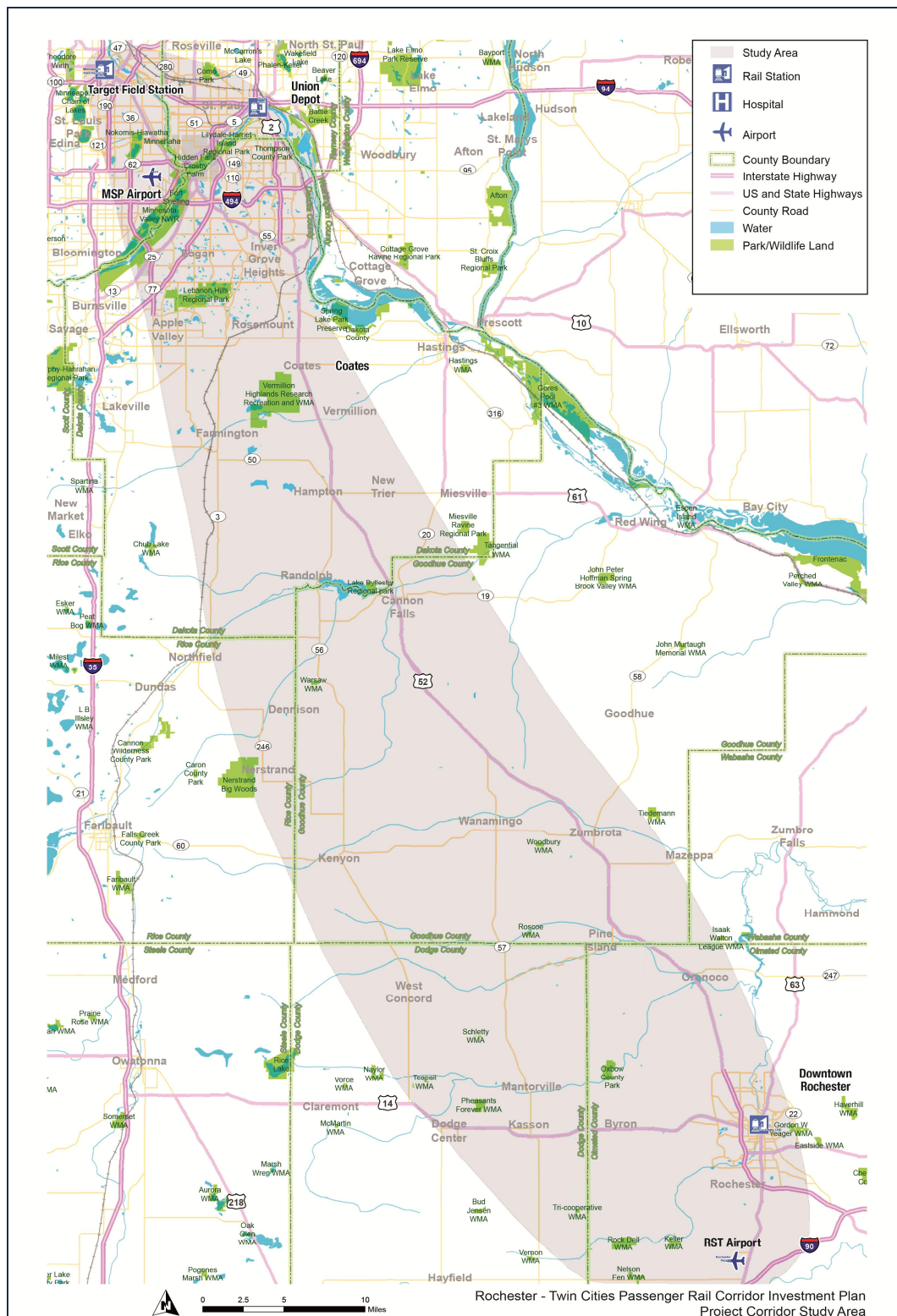
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<sup>1</sup> The Tier 2 study can be an EIS, an Environmental Assessment, a Categorical Exclusion, or a combination of different classes of action (40 CFR Section 1502.20).





**Figure 3. Project Corridor Study Area**



Zip Rail is proposed as a high speed express service between Rochester and the Twin Cities. As part of the evaluation process, an intermediate station is under consideration in Dakota County.

With no existing direct rail connection between Rochester and the Twin Cities, the proposed corridors would predominately include new or “greenfield” rail right-of-way and/or new rail construction, located to the maximum extent practicable along or within existing public or railway right-of-way. As a high-speed rail project, trains in some sections of the corridor would travel at speeds of 186+ mph, with a projected travel time of approximately 45-50 minutes between the Twin Cities and Rochester. All corridor segments in which train speeds exceed 125 mph must be “sealed,” which means that no at-grade crossings would be permitted and that the corridor would need to be secured. However, at-grade crossings, with 4-quad gates and/or other safety improvements, would be permitted in segments where speeds are less than 125 mph.

Means and methods of construction of the project cannot be determined until the environmental review process (Tier 1 and Tier 2 EIS) is completed. The determination of whether segments of the project are constructed at grade or elevated, as conditions warrant, will be assessed during the subsequent Tier 2 phase. When indicated, tracks or existing roadways could be elevated as a means of maintaining existing local access. The determination of actual right-of-way or easement requirements also cannot be assessed until the environmental review process is completed. It is the objective of the project to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential impacts to the maximum extent possible.

Potential locations for maintenance, storage and layover facilities would be evaluated as part of the Tier 2 EIS after a preferred corridor has been identified.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the Zip Rail project is to study potential reliable and safe high speed passenger rail transportation alternatives that would meet forecasted population and economic growth and mobility demands in the Southeast Minnesota corridor between Rochester and the Twin Cities area. The system would connect the Twin Cities and Rochester by providing a convenient and cost effective transportation alternative. The project is being developed to:

- Provide intercity passenger rail service linking the regional economic center of Rochester and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area economic hub
- Provide travel options for the growing population and accessibility to population centers
- Improve convenience and time of travel
- Complement the plans of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI)<sup>2</sup> and *Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/passengerrail/mwrri/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/railplan/>

The identified need for expanded transportation options in this Southeast Minnesota corridor is based on the following elements:

- **Increase in population and employment in Rochester, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, and Southeast Minnesota**

The state of Minnesota is expected to grow faster than the Midwest region as a whole. According to the US Census Bureau (2010), the Minnesota population was 5.3 million people with over half of that total in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Counties between Rochester and the Twin Cities project a population increase within a range of 20 to 49 percent over the next 30 years.

The number of jobs currently supported by Rochester employers exceeds the available adult working population in the urban area. This makes Rochester an economic driver for an area of approximately 2,300 square miles in southeast Minnesota, northeast Iowa, and western Wisconsin, impacting employment as far away as the Twin Cities area. Rochester ranks as the fastest growing metropolitan area in the state (2012), with a low unemployment rate and a relatively high per capita and household income in comparison to other regional centers in the state.

As a percentage, counties between Rochester and the Twin Cities project employment to grow by 20 percent or greater over the next 30 years. The net employment change would be the greatest in counties surrounding the Twin Cities, with notable increases also within Olmsted County. Within the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul region, the labor force is projected to increase 5.6 percent from 2015 to 2030 (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2011). Outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan counties, Olmsted County is the next largest county in employment in the state in 2010. Total employment for the county gained more than 4,000 new jobs between the years 2000 and 2010.

- **Anticipated travel demand to accommodate growth in economic generators and attractions such as the Mayo Clinic and University of Minnesota as well as services and industries that will support those facilities**

Population increases are predicted to result in increased travel demand. These population increases are anticipated to result from: the expansion of biomedical and other facilities in Rochester; the nearly 2,000,000 annual visitors to the Mayo Clinic; an increase of employment at the Mayo Clinic; and plans to increase student enrollment at the University of Minnesota–Rochester (both short-term and long-term).

The Mayo Clinic and other biomedical and high tech industries create a demand for convenient travel for both visitors and workers in and around Rochester. These industries, specifically the Mayo Clinic, attract daily travelers by facilitating access to jobs. They also attract visitors, patients and caregivers from across the region and the US because of the type of specialized healthcare services provided. Visitors who come to Rochester by way of the Twin Cities need choices for alternative transportation modes that are convenient.

Because of the unique visitor traffic generated by the Mayo Clinic, the presence of biomedical and high tech jobs at IBM, the recent (2006) establishment of the University of Minnesota-Rochester and numerous other partnerships between entities in Rochester and the Twin Cities, there is a need for efficient, convenient and high-quality transportation in the southeast Minnesota corridor. As a result of these traffic generators, nearly 2.75 million people visit Rochester annually. Of those, it is estimated that 70 percent of those visitors traveled to Rochester to visit the Mayo Clinic (2010).

- **Limited direct and convenient transportation connectivity opportunities for the corridor between Rochester and the Twin Cities**

US 52 is the main highway that connects Rochester to the Twin Cities. There is no interstate highway within the corridor between the two termini and no passenger rail service. To the west, I-35 is the closest interstate highway to the corridor. A traveler would need to utilize an east-west route, such as US 14, to access I-35 to make the connection to the Twin Cities. In current conditions, the trip via automobile is approximately one hour and 30 minutes on US 52 and approximately two hours using I-35 and US 14. A high-speed passenger rail option would offer intercity travelers an alternative to automobile travel at a similar or decreased travel time.

The proposed project would need to meet existing and future transportation connectivity demands of the corridor between Rochester and the Twin Cities in a manner that contributes to an overall multi-modal transportation system. As the population, employment, and number of visitors grow along the corridor, especially in the Twin Cities and Rochester, the number of people travelling between these locations will increase, creating increased demand on existing transportation resources.

The complete Purpose and Need Statement for this project has been posted to the project website at: [http://goziprail.org/info\\_center/](http://goziprail.org/info_center/).

## **ALTERNATIVES SCREENING PROCESS—THE PROCESS USED TO IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVES FOR STUDY IN THE TIER 1 EIS**

As part of the scoping process, a specific set of criteria were developed for evaluating each of the alternative corridor segments in order to recommend which corridor alternative should advance for further consideration. These criteria were based on the project's Purpose and Need Statement that was discussed previously in this document. The first step was to determine whether a corridor alternative met the purpose and need for the project. Alternatives that clearly did not meet the purpose and need were discarded.

### **Screening Criteria**

The remaining alternatives were screened through a two-step evaluation process. Level 1 evaluation criteria were based on general project performance and impacts for all identified segment alternatives. In Level 2, more detailed performance criteria and impact data were applied to full end-to-end (Twin Cities to Rochester) corridor alternatives.



For the purposes of this multi-step screening process and for the environmental analysis the following definitions and parameters were established:

- **Corridor** – Each potential alternative is considered within the context of a study corridor. The corridors are approximately one mile wide (½ mile either side of a conceptual centerline). This width allows for flexibility as the design proceeds and provides opportunities to minimize impacts to existing land uses and environmental resources. The corridor is a geographic footprint within which the final project alignment would be located. The width of the final alignment is expected to be a few hundred feet, whereas the corridor is much wider for study purposes.
- **Alignment** – An alignment is the actual location of the right-of-way or easement footprint within the preferred corridor that would be secured to construct the high-speed rail line. The preferred corridor will be identified in the Tier 1 EIS. Specific alignments would not be identified until the Tier 2 phase.
- **Right-of-Way** – As noted above, the specific right-of-way or easement footprint for each alternative would not be identified until the Tier 2 phase. It is assumed that an approximately 200-foot right-of-way envelope would be evaluated for the identified alternative in the Tier 2 phase.

It is important to emphasize that the corridor alternatives development and evaluation process during the Tier 1 EIS is set at a high level of analysis. This “high level” of analysis implies environmental analyses are completed at a more general level where existing information is compiled for corridors and used for comparison purposes. At the Tier 1 level, the analysis is used to assess a large number of alternatives while keeping the level of analysis manageable, and to identify a fatally flawed option. Enough information is gathered to facilitate informed decision making while setting the stage for field studies and more detailed, site-specific analysis during the Tier 2 process. In Tier 2, environmental impacts and mitigation strategies would be determined for the preferred corridor, specifically for the identified alignment.

The screening criteria used in the scoping process to analyze the universe of alternatives and to identify the corridor alternatives presented in this FSDD are described below.

### **Level 1 Screening**

Level 1 screening evaluated the alternative segments using the following criteria:

- **Redundancy:** Locations where multiple service options exist that reflect the same relative service area.
- **Preliminary Travel Time:** Rough estimates were developed for the proposed service using approximations of average speeds over major route segments. Travel time estimates would be refined as part of the Service Development Plan process.
- **Impacts to the Built Environment:** Potential impacts to adjacent land uses were evaluated in both urban and rural settings in order to avoid and minimize impacts.

- **Impacts to the Natural Environment:** Known critical environmental resources were identified including lakes, rivers, parks and other critical areas. The number of potential water crossings was quantified.

In addition to the reduction in alternatives from Level 1 screening, the project team collected input from cities, counties and other stakeholders within the study area. The list of alternatives recommended for further study was refined to reflect local planning efforts regarding both transportation and land use.

Matching all of the individual segments together produced a total of 15 end-to-end alternatives for evaluation as part of Level 2. In each case, these alignments lie within an approximately one mile wide corridor, with the anticipation that any future alignment would likely have a right-of-way width of approximately 200 feet.

## **Level 2 Screening**

With the reduced number of alternatives for Level 2 consideration, more detailed evaluation was possible. Criteria applied in Level 2 included:

- **Travel Time:** Travel time estimates for each alternative were refined from the work completed as part of the Level 1 screening. The estimates were developed based on assumptions including route length, travel speed, curve radii, and other route-specific information.
- **Top Speed:** Alternatives were evaluated using the same route specific information studied in the Travel Time criteria. Calculations were developed for each alternative to determine its potential top speed.
- **Consistency with Local Planning:** Alternatives were evaluated based on their consistency with local planning efforts regarding both transportation and land use.
- **Connectivity:** Alternatives were evaluated to assess their connectivity to other passenger rail and multimodal passenger service.
- **Ridership Projections:** High-level projections for annual riders were developed using factors such as travel time, connectivity to other intercity passenger rail, and reliability and frequency of service (i.e., more train sets/round trips).
- **Potential freight rail conflicts:** Alternative corridors were evaluated based on the difficulty of implementation and anticipated costs that would be expected for a host freight railroad to accommodate high-speed passenger rail service on their property.
- **Social, Economic and Environmental (SEE) Factors:** A more formalized consideration of key SEE factors was included in Level 2. Examples include high level estimates of impacts to wetlands, parklands, and residential neighborhoods (both right-of-way and noise concerns). The assessment was consistent with state and federal environmental requirements and is the foundation for more detailed analysis in the Tier 1 EIS.

The result of the Level 2 evaluation was the identification of eight potential corridors that are recommended to be carried forward into the Tier 1 EIS (see Figure 4). The screening criteria and

further discussion of the analysis will be included in the “Alternatives Considered” section of the Tier 1 EIS.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO BE STUDIED IN THE TIER 1 EIS**

### **No-Build Alternative**

The No-Build alternative will be carried through the Tier 1 EIS process. The No-Build alternative reflects existing conditions, and includes all currently programmed improvements in the project area over the next 20 years including highway, transit or other investments. The No-Build alternative will not include passenger rail since rail service is currently not within the study area.

The No-Build alternative will be defined in the Tier 1 EIS based on committed projects identified in the most recent Minnesota State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP identifies the schedule and funding of transportation projects. It includes all state and local transportation projects with federal highway and/or federal transit funding along with 100 percent state funded transportation projects. Greater Minnesota metropolitan planning organization programs are included in the listing, which will include projects identified by the Rochester-Olmsted Council of Governments. Local projects that are programmed will be included in the listing.

The No-Build alternative serves as the base of comparison for the potential Build alternatives. It will be analyzed to the same level as Build alternatives in the Tier 1 EIS. The No-Build alternative will be assessed for its ability to meet the project purpose and need and evaluated for potential impacts. If implementing the No-Build alternative would result in predictable actions by others, this impact would be part of the effects of the No-Build alternative.

### **Build Alternatives**

The Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor project team initially developed a universe of alternatives based on previous studies, meetings with key project stakeholders and from field observations. For this project, each “alternative” refers to an approximately one-mile wide corridor that would serve as a geographic footprint for initial study, in order to ultimately identify a much narrower rail alignment as described previously. The universe of alternatives identified more than 1,200 potential alternative combinations when considering the initial five different terminal options. These 1,200 alternative combinations were screened to eight potential “end to end” alternatives using the criteria described in the Alternatives Screening Process.

These corridor alternatives were presented for public comment to each county within the study area and at a series of public meetings between May and July, 2014. More detailed information about the public outreach efforts for this project can be found in Appendix A: Summary of Public Outreach Activities for Scoping and Scoping Comments.

Utilizing the results of the screening process as well as comments received through the public involvement process, the eight “end to end” corridor alternatives proposed for further analysis in the Tier 1 EIS are shown in Figure 4. The alternatives include four segments north of Coates that connect with MSP, Union Depot or both. South of Coates, two primary options are

recommended for further consideration. The first extends southeast generally along the US 52 corridor, and the second extends south in the general proximity of the MN 56 corridor before turning east along the US 14 corridor into Rochester.

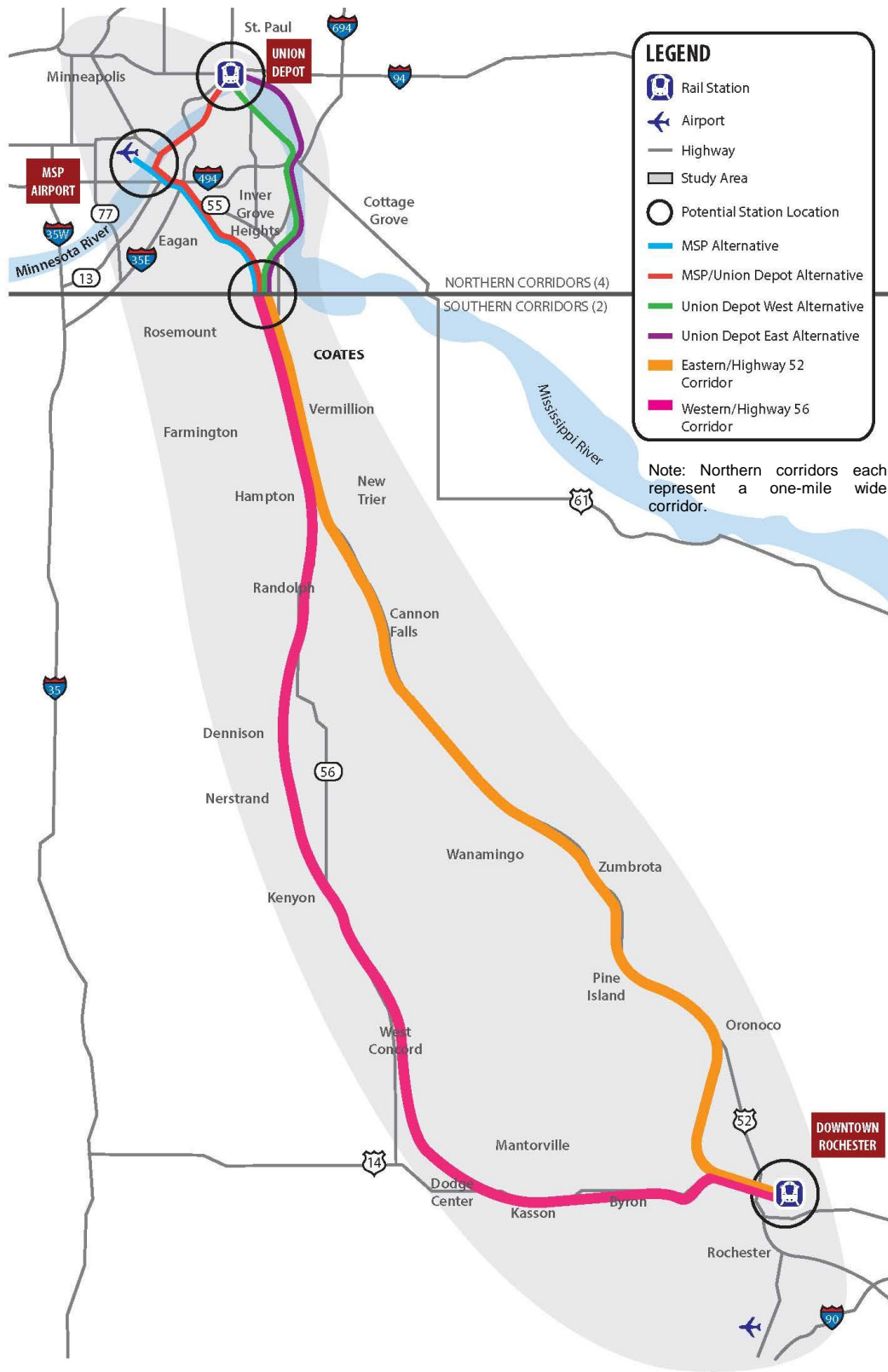
Either of the southern segments can be paired with any of the four northern segments to create an end to end corridor alternative as described below.

As a direct result of the public responses at meetings and written public comments, a new “hybrid” alternative was developed in the US 52 corridor. The alternative presented in the Draft Scoping Decision Document (DSDD) was identified as located west of the US 52 right-of-way, potentially extending two to three miles. Public comments and further discussion with MnDOT staff led to a refined hybrid corridor that would generally begin in the existing right-of-way of US 52 and extend west, but remain closer to the US 52 right-of-way than initially described in the DSDD. This alternative is called a “hybrid” because it combines the best attributes of two previously evaluated corridors.

The alternatives screening criteria were used to analyze this refined hybrid corridor, which is adjacent to and within the US 52 right-of-way, and approximately one-mile wide to facilitate comparison with the other corridor options. Additional information on the screening criteria used for the hybrid corridor will be included in the Tier 1 EIS, in the “Alternatives Considered” section.



**Figure 4. Alternatives Recommended for Further Consideration in the Tier 1 EIS**



## **Northern Corridor Segments - Coates to MSP and/or Union Depot**

Between the Twin Cities and Coates, a total of four segments have been identified as part of the overall alternatives for further consideration. Two of the four segments extend northwest from Coates to the vicinity of Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) and two extend north and east from Coates to the Union Depot in St. Paul.

### ***MSP Options***

These alternatives extend northwest along Dakota County Road 71 through Rosemount and Inver Grove Heights, transitioning to a corridor parallel to the existing Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) in Eagan and MN 149, then northwest to the I-494 corridor. From this point there are two options; the first option continues across the Minnesota River Valley with a new railroad bridge on or adjacent to I-494 to provide a connection to the MSP vicinity. The second option includes a potential station in the area of Pilot Knob Road and I-494. From the station, passengers could transfer to a vehicular shuttle to connect to MSP or continue northeast by railroad to the Union Depot, using the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) alignment and entering Union Depot from the west. A variation to this option would be to serve both the MSP vicinity and the Union Depot by rail, which could include a wye but would preclude the need for the potential transfer station near Pilot Knob Road.

### ***Union Depot Options***

Continuing north from Coates, the Union Depot options extend west of Flint Hills Resources and connect with the UP rail corridor through Inver Grove Heights. The options continue north on the UP rail corridor to the vicinity of I-494. Near I-494 the options split. The Union Depot West Alternative continues along the west side of the Mississippi River on the UP rail corridor and crosses the river in the vicinity of the Robert Street Bridge in downtown St. Paul. The Union Depot East Alternative crosses the Mississippi River on a new railroad bridge just south of I-494 and joins the CP rail corridor on the east side of the river. From there, the alignment would either share track or construct a new track (at grade or elevated) through the existing rail yard and enter Union Depot from the east.

## **Southern Corridor Segments - Coates to Downtown Rochester**

South of Coates, two primary options are recommended for further consideration. The Eastern Corridor extends southeast generally along the US 52 corridor, and the Western Corridor extends south in the general proximity of the MN 56 corridor before turning east along the US 14 corridor into Rochester.

Either of the two southern segments can be paired with any of the four northern segments to create an end to end alternative. These individual segments represent a total of eight potential end to end Build alternatives.

### ***Eastern Corridor (US 52)***

As the study began, the Eastern Corridor was limited to one alternative within, or adjacent to the US 52 highway right-of-way. However, the alternatives screening process identified a number

of geometric and topographic concerns with the proposed alternative that would limit the ability to provide true high speed service (186+ mph) exclusively within the US 52 right-of-way.

As an option to replace the alternative within, or adjacent to the US 52 highway right-of-way, a second Eastern Corridor alternative was developed and presented in the DSDD. This corridor was identified to be located between two and three miles west of the existing US 52 right-of-way. This second corridor was developed with a focus on minimizing impacts to existing land uses near US 52, while maximizing the ability to attain higher operating speeds.

Based on the issues identified with both Eastern Corridor alternatives and input received from project presentations and public comments received during and after the public meetings held in July, 2014, a new hybrid corridor was developed. This new hybrid corridor incorporates the most desirable features of both previously studied alternatives. The objective of this corridor is to provide the opportunity to utilize existing US 52 right-of-way and median where possible, and to provide maximum flexibility for design of a future alignment that best meets the project's Purpose and Need, and to stay primarily west of US 52.

Between Coates and a point just north of Pine Island, the corridor is west of US 52, but including the existing right-of-way. Immediately north of Pine Island, the one mile wide corridor is centered on US 52. South of Oronoco, the corridor extends southwest away from US 52 to follow a corridor near US 14 into Rochester.

This study corridor will allow future service to be designed in a manner that minimizes potential impacts to existing land uses and environmental features, while maximizing the ability to attain and maintain true high-speed rail operations (186+ mph).

Some areas of the US 52 highway corridor can accommodate Zip Rail within or adjacent to its right-of-way. Other sections present challenges for running true high speed service because of the roadway curves, topography, and potential for impacts to intersecting roads and interchanges. The corridor includes several communities including Cannon Falls, Zumbrota, Pine Island and Oronoco, as well as other urban and rural developments that will be considered as the alignment is developed. The hybrid corridor allows for maximum flexibility in the ultimate identification of a final alignment for this project. It is anticipated that this flexibility will allow the project team to identify an alignment with the fewest impacts.

#### ***Western Corridor (MN 56)***

This corridor continues south from Hampton. It was drawn to roughly parallel MN 56 and portions of an abandoned rail right-of-way along much of the MN 56 alignment. The proposed corridor would extend along the east side of the communities of Randolph, Kenyon, and West Concord prior to reaching Dodge Center where it turns east and follows the US 14 corridor into Rochester. The corridor was drawn to minimize impacts to existing land uses, including communities, the agricultural uses that are dominate in this corridor and environmental features, while maximizing the ability to attain and maintain true high-speed rail operations (186+ mph).

### ***Corridor Terminals***

As illustrated in Figure 4 the proposed terminal stations are downtown Rochester at the south end and MSP and/or Union Depot in the Twin Cities. Preliminary ridership studies indicated that these locations showed the strongest demand for service.

Potential terminal stations at the Rochester International Airport and Target Field have been removed from consideration as part of this study process. Preliminary ridership forecasting indicated relatively light demand to and from the Rochester International Airport when compared to a downtown Rochester station. A rail link between downtown Rochester and the Rochester International Airport could be considered in the future as part of any Zip Rail extension planning.

The Target Field Station was removed from consideration in this study and will be addressed as a high-speed rail terminal as part of the Twin Cities to Milwaukee/Chicago High Speed Rail Study. Access to Target Field Station would be provided from MSP via the Metro Blue Line or from Union Depot using the Metro Green Line. A link to Target Field Station could be considered in the future as part of any Zip Rail extension planning.

### ***Intermediate Stations***

The alternatives for further consideration also include possible intermediate stations. One possibility is the previously mentioned station in the vicinity of MSP, near Pilot Knob Road. This potential station location would serve as an intermediate stop between Union Depot and Rochester.

A potential intermediate station has been identified in the general vicinity of CR 42 and US 52 in Dakota County. The exact location of this station has not been identified. However, a station in this area would serve as an intermediate stop on any of the alternatives that have been identified for further consideration.

## **SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The Service Development Plan (SDP) is a comprehensive business and operating plan that lays out the overall scope and approach for the proposed rail service. The SDP will incorporate and reflect the business case for investment in the corridor supported by technical information and service operating plans that show train frequencies and schedules, ridership and revenue projections, capital needs for both equipment and infrastructure, and an assessment of the economic benefits and costs and financial projections. The SDP will also include a recommended implementation plan that shows how the service improvements could be phased over time.

The SDP will be prepared using conceptual engineering for the project and developed concurrently with the identification of a preferred corridor in the Tier 1 EIS document. High-speed rail projects require the information in the SDP to support the business case for project development. It must result in an appropriate benefit-cost analysis for a project to qualify for further federal funding.



## **PROJECT COST, FUNDING SOURCE, AND SCHEDULE**

Specific cost estimates have not yet been developed for the various alternatives advancing for further study. Detailed cost estimates will be developed in the SDP for the preferred corridor alternative identified in the Tier 1 EIS.

The current phase of project study has been funded by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority (OCRRA). Funding for future phases of project work beyond the Tier 1 EIS and Service Development Plan (SDP) has not yet been secured. If a Build alternative is identified in the Tier 1 EIS and supported by the analysis in the SDP, it is anticipated that the project would seek continued funding from local, state, federal and private sources.

The Tier 1 EIS is scheduled for completion in 2015. Subsequent phases of project work would be scheduled if a Build alternative is identified and supported by the SDP. The future schedule of work will depend on funds identified and secured for the individual phases of work.

## **ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE EIS PROCESS**

Information for completing the environmental issues identification was gathered through a variety of sources including literature reviews, field investigations, and GIS data analysis. Regulatory agencies and local governments provided important input through participation in Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings and the agency coordination meetings held in 2013 and 2014. The agency coordination meetings focused on informing agency representatives about the proposed project and tiered environmental review process and requesting their input, and addressing comments and questions. Formal and informal agency coordination and consultation will continue throughout the EIS process. It is anticipated that FRA will invite federal agencies including the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) and others to become Cooperating Agencies early in the Tier 1 EIS process as defined in NEPA regulations.

In addition to agency coordination, public information meetings were held in the summers of 2013 and 2014 to present project information and to provide an opportunity for the public to comment on key issues and potential impacts related to the project. Information gathered in these meetings contributed to the development and evaluation of the alternatives.

The FRA uses a tiered EIS process for its NEPA studies that reflects the scale and scope of rail projects. As a result, it is more practical to conduct a two-step environmental review. Step 1 (Tier 1) assesses impacts to the corridor as a whole for the purpose of identifying a preferred corridor. Tier 1 compares the Build alternatives to the No-Build alternative. Should the No-Build alternative be selected, no further project development would occur. Tier 1 data collection is generally a “desktop” survey using existing data where it is available. Should a Build alternative be identified, Step 2 (Tier 2) would examine site-specific impacts to the preferred corridor, and information would be developed to identify the specific track alignment within the preferred corridor.

In Tier 1, environmental analyses are completed at a more general level where existing information is compiled for corridors and used for comparison purposes. If a Build alternative is identified, the Tier 2 EIS would analyze site-specific information supported by field studies after a preferred corridor and related service information have been determined. In Tier 2, detailed environmental impacts and mitigation strategies would be determined for the preferred corridor, specifically for the identified alignment.

The environmental resources listed below encompass the subject areas that will be assessed in the Tier 1 EIS to support identification of the preferred corridor. If a Build alternative is identified, the proposed project and its impact limits will be more clearly defined in the Tier 2 EIS. Each subject area includes a description of what will be addressed along with references to ongoing agency coordination efforts.

### ***Land Use***

The project study area is defined by a broad range of land use types from the Twin Cities to Rochester. The Tier 1 EIS will compare the project alternatives with existing land use and future land use plans in the identified corridors. The Tier 1 EIS will quantify the amount of land use by type in each corridor to facilitate a comparison of the differences between the project alternatives.

### ***Agricultural***

As a part of the Tier 1 EIS process, impacts to agricultural lands will be addressed by determining the amount of farmland that could potentially be converted to a different use by each alternative. Additionally, county soil surveys will be consulted in conjunction with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) data to determine the amount of prime and unique farmlands, within the converted farmland, potentially affected by each alternative in order to compare the corridors. Where appropriate GIS data sets are available, total farmland acreage by corridor will be computed. Upon identification of a preferred alternative, the Tier 2 EIS will identify the alignment within the preferred corridor and provide detailed analysis of potential impacts to farmlands including the potential impact of severed parcels on farming operations. Additionally, during the Tier 2 EIS, pursuant to the Farmland Protection Policy Act, a Farmland Conversion Impact Rating form will be completed and coordinated with the NRCS.

### ***Community Character/Cohesion***

The Tier 1 EIS will identify those locations where a corridor has the potential to separate a community from local facilities or other resources, whether in an urban neighborhood or in a rural setting. These areas will be highlighted on project mapping to facilitate a comparison of the differences between the project corridor alternatives.

### ***Environmental Justice***

Executive Order 12898 requires the assessment of impacts on minority and low-income populations. The Tier 1 EIS will identify if any minority and/or low-income populations are present in the project corridors based on current data (2010 US Census Bureau and 5-year American Community Survey). The Tier 2 EIS will determine an appropriate area for analysis of

disproportionate impacts related to the alignment location in the preferred corridor and would include further coordination with local communities throughout the public involvement process.

### ***Community Facilities/Public Services***

The Tier 1 EIS will identify key community facilities in proximity to the project corridors using available data obtained from communities in the project area and GIS data sources. These facilities will include city halls, fire stations, hospitals, libraries, churches, community centers, and other institutional uses. The location of emergency services will be a critical element of this analysis and would identify how services may potentially be affected by various alternatives. The Tier 1 EIS will present the data graphically to facilitate a comparison of the differences between the project corridor alternatives.

### ***Noise/Vibration***

The project has the potential to introduce noise and vibration impacts within the project corridors. The levels of impact are dependent on train technology, frequency of service, speed of travel, and the proximity of sensitive receptors. The Tier 1 EIS will identify potential sensitive receptors adjacent to or in the project corridors.

In the Tier 2 EIS, noise and vibration levels for existing conditions will be measured in the field and future conditions, with and without the project, will be modeled. The modeling results will provide estimates of noise and vibration levels at sensitive receptors (i.e. residences, parks, hospitals, etc.) along the preferred corridor, which will be identified through the Tier 1 EIS. Both the noise and vibration analyses will be based on federal (Federal Railroad Administration) and state (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)) guidelines.

### ***Air Quality***

The Tier 1 EIS will summarize air quality monitoring data attainment status of the study area, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) status, and determine if a detailed air quality assessment may be necessary in Tier 2. The Tier 1 EIS will qualitatively assess the impacts based on the available information, such as type of train equipment proposed, ancillary facilities (maintenance and storage), parking facilities, and effects on regional vehicle miles travelled (VMT) including any additional bus or shuttle service, if applicable.

The Tier 2 EIS will verify whether detailed air quality assessments will be required for the preferred corridor. If required, the scope of the analyses will be defined in consultation with the MPCA. Any detailed air quality analysis will adhere to the applicable Federal, State and local regulations and guidance.

### ***Energy***

Changes in regional energy consumption resulting from the project will be reported in the Tier 1 EIS. The Tier 1 EIS will evaluate the availability of electric generation capacity and energy resources based on an assumed electric train technology and service level. Consultation with regional electric utilities and review of their current Resource Plans will be documented. Assessment of potential substation locations will be undertaken in the Tier 2 EIS when the proposed alignment has been identified. This section of the Tier 1 EIS will also consider the potential for stray voltage impacts.

### ***Geology/Soils***

The study area includes a broad range of geological and soil conditions that could affect construction of rail lines. Consultation with the MPCA will be undertaken to identify areas susceptible to erosion, areas where there is a presence of karst topography, and areas subject to consideration of groundwater flow and groundwater recharge along the Decorah Edge in Goodhue and Olmsted counties. In the Tier 1 EIS, relative erosion potential will be assessed using available GIS data to quantify and map areas of steep slopes to enable a comparison of differences between project corridor alternatives. Karst topography and Decorah Edge issues are most prominent in the southern portion of the study area. These specific locations will be identified and mapped in the Tier 1 EIS and the degree to which each alternative extends through these locations will be quantified. Consultation will occur with the MPCA, MnDNR and Minnesota Geological Survey to ensure consensus on study of the most critical areas.

### ***Water Quality/Stormwater***

The Tier 1 EIS will refer to the Geology/Soils assessment to identify where erosion is of greatest concern. Areas with steep slopes will serve as a predictor of relative erosion potential and increased water quality concern. In addition, the Tier 1 EIS will identify and map impaired waters in the project area. Using GIS, the proposed alternatives will be overlaid on the impaired water data and total acreage by alternative will be tabulated for comparison.

Assessment of potential impacts to existing public and private wells will be undertaken in the Tier 2 EIS when the proposed alignment has been identified. Coordination will occur with applicable water resource agencies including area watershed districts (Ramsey-Washington-Metro, South Washington, Belle Creek, Vermillion River), the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), and the MPCA to identify Best Management Practices (BMPs) for construction and operation of the rail facilities.

### ***Wetlands***

The Tier 1 EIS will focus on wetlands within each corridor identified by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) mapping. The total acreage of NWI resources within each corridor will be computed to facilitate a comparison of the relative differences in potential wetland impacts by corridor alternative. Coordination will occur with the applicable jurisdictions including the US Army Corps of Engineers and the MnDNR. During Tier 2, field reviews will be completed to identify wetland resources within the preferred corridor that could be impacted by the project.



### ***Water Resources***

The study area contains a variety of water resources including but not limited to:

- Mississippi River
- Minnesota River
- Vermillion River
- Lake Byllesby
- Cannon River
- Zumbro River

Both southern corridors require new crossings of the Vermillion, Cannon, and Zumbro rivers in rural areas. For the northern corridors, potential crossings of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers may be required. These crossings may be new bridges, rehabilitated existing bridges, or expansion of existing bridges. Coordination will occur with the applicable local jurisdictions as well as the US Army Corps of Engineers and the MnDNR.

The Tier 1 EIS will quantify the number of water crossings required for each alternative, identify other water resources impact issues such as special designations, and identify potential permits that may be required. During Tier 2, field reviews will be completed to identify water resources within the preferred corridor that could be impacted by the project.

### ***Wild and Scenic Rivers***

The Cannon River is designated as a State Wild and Scenic River. As part of the Tier 1 EIS, MnDNR staff will be contacted to determine whether there are substantial differences in the potential impacts to the Cannon River by alternative.

### ***Critical Areas***

The Mississippi River from the northwestern Twin Cities to the St. Croix River confluence near Hastings is a designated Critical Area. The Tier 1 EIS will identify those alternatives that parallel or cross the Mississippi River.

### ***Floodplains***

Floodplains in the study area are related to the various river and stream crossings. In the Tier 1 EIS, the 100-year floodplain for each resource will be identified using GIS. The total floodplain area (transverse and longitudinal) within each study corridor will be quantified to facilitate comparison. The more comprehensive Floodplain Assessment required to address Federal and State regulations will be prepared in the Tier 2 EIS.

### ***Fish, Wildlife, Threatened and Endangered Species***

For the Tier 1 EIS, MnDNR administered lands within the proposed study corridors will be identified using available data sources. The most recent data will be obtained from the MnDNR Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) database, the regional non-game wildlife specialist, and the county distribution of Minnesota's Federally-Listed Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate Species list and reviewed for each corridor alternative. Natural communities,

special and sensitive land, potential rare natural communities, and other areas of high conservation value will also be identified along with wildlife corridors. Documented rare, threatened, and endangered species and habitat will also be tabulated.

The Tier 1 EIS will map and tabulate the above referenced resources to assist in differentiating the various impacts associated with each corridor alternative. This work will be completed in coordination with the MnDNR. During Tier 2, field reviews will be completed to identify habitat for threatened and endangered species that could occur within the preferred corridor and could be impacted by the project. Mitigation strategies will be identified during Tier 2.

### ***Cultural Resources***

The Tier 1 EIS will identify known cultural resources listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), including architectural and archaeological resources, in the Area of Potential Effects (APE). Previously inventoried properties will also be identified for planning purposes in the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office's (SHPO) files but no surveys or determinations of NRHP eligibility will be completed during Tier 1. Recommendations will be made for more detailed survey work to be completed in Tier 2. The project's potential effects to cultural resources, based on available project information, will be documented in the Tier 1 EIS.

In Tier 2, a refined APE field survey, and determinations of NRHP eligibility will be completed and documented. Effects assessments will be deferred to the Tier 2 EIS when more detailed project information is available and additional surveys and studies are conducted. Throughout Tier 1 and 2, in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, consultation with the SHPO and Section 106 consulting parties will occur.

### ***Transportation***

*Highways:* A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that could potentially be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document potential changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network.

The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.

*Freight Railroads:* Several project alternatives parallel active freight rail lines, especially in the north end of the project study area. The Tier 1 EIS will quantify, by project alternative, the locations and total miles where co-location or some level of shared use may occur. Ongoing coordination with the freight railroads will continue through the Tier 1 and Tier 2 EIS.

*Aviation:* The Tier 1 EIS will identify the preferred corridor for the project and relationship to airports in the vicinity. The project team will continue to consult with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), Metropolitan Council, MnDOT

Metro District, MnDOT Aeronautics, cities, counties and other agencies with jurisdiction in studying connections in the vicinity of MSP in the Tier 1 EIS process. Alignments and potential access changes will be evaluated in the Tier 2 EIS. Coordination will also be conducted with the St. Paul Downtown, South St. Paul, Dodge Center and Stanton airports that are also proximate to proposed corridors.

***Pedestrian/Bicyclist Movements:*** The Tier 1 EIS will identify major pedestrian/bicycle facilities within or proximate to the proposed corridors for comparison between corridor alternatives. The Tier 2 EIS will identify impacts to any noted pedestrian/bicycle facilities when the right-of-way and alignment within the preferred corridor is identified.

***Transit:*** The project is being planned to connect to existing or proposed transit facilities in both the Twin Cities and in Rochester. The Tier 1 EIS will identify and quantify the primary transit connections planned or provided by each terminal location.

***Park and Recreational Properties (Section 4(f)/6(f))***

The Tier 1 EIS will identify public parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic properties listed on and eligible for listing on the NRHP that are adjacent to or within the proposed project corridors. These properties are protected under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act. Those properties that are also Section 6(f) properties will be identified. Section 6(f) properties are recreation resources created or improved with funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act. These properties cannot be converted to other uses unless replacement land of equal fair market value and equivalent usefulness is provided as mitigation. The Section 4(f) Evaluation and Section 6(f) documentation will be prepared for the Tier 2 EIS as needed.

***Utilities***

The Tier 1 EIS will use available GIS data sources to identify and map major above ground and underground utility lines to facilitate comparisons between the proposed corridors.

***Contamination/Hazardous Materials***

The Tier 1 EIS will research available data resources to identify and map documented sites proximate to the proposed corridors that are known to contain hazardous materials. Data sources will include MPCA databases as well as other established GIS datasets. The information will be geo-referenced with the project alternatives and the number of sites within each alternative's study area will be quantified to facilitate a comparison of the relative differences between corridor alternatives. Coordination will occur with MPCA as needed during the Tier 1 EIS process.

**ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE TIER 2 EIS**

If a Build alternative is selected to be carried forward into a Tier 2 EIS, there are several environmental subject areas that require more specific information to enable technical analysis and impact quantification. Given the scale of the proposed project and study area, it is not feasible to develop the more detailed project information until the Tier 2 EIS when a preferred

corridor and alignment alternative have been identified and the train technology has been defined. The subject areas listed below are those that must be analyzed at the Tier 2 EIS level. A brief description of the anticipated technical analysis is also included.

***Right-of-way and Relocation***

Given the size of the study area and scope of the project, right-of-way acquisition of rural and urban land and potential residential and business relocations are anticipated. After a preferred corridor is identified in the Tier 1 EIS, an alignment would be determined in the Tier 2 EIS and would be a basis for identifying land required for construction of the project. Acreages of land for acquisition, and the number of businesses and residences that could potentially be relocated will also be identified in the Tier 2 EIS.

No property acquisition for right-of-way may be undertaken until the completion of all environmental documents. Any acquisition of property for right-of-way would be in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-646) and MnDOT's established process for property acquisition.

***Visual/Aesthetics***

Land uses in the study area consist of a range of urban, suburban, and rural characteristics. This analysis will be conducted during the Tier 2 EIS, after identification of the preferred corridor and proposed track alignment. A visual assessment will be conducted using land use adjacent to each alternative as a proxy for relative visual sensitivity. The assessment will consider potential viewers of the proposed project and views from the proposed project. Residential and park land uses will be considered the most visually sensitive resources. The assessment will identify and quantify the total amount of sensitive adjacent land uses (in miles) that are within the estimated sightline of the proposed track alignment.

***Economics/Business Impacts***

The primary economic and business effects associated with the proposed project are linked to potential right-of-way impacts and potential changes in roadway access. There is also potential for positive economic and business effects related to economic development and job creation in and around station and maintenance facility areas. In the Tier 2 EIS, the economic assessment will build from the information compiled for the traffic and roadway system impact analysis to determine areas where potential changes in roadway access could affect commercial and agricultural land uses and daily operations in both farm and community settings. The potential change in accessibility will be measured through travel distance changes. This information will be used to assist the process of refining road network modifications and potential mitigation (including new roadway segments and/or grade separations) as may be required. The potential for job creation and beneficial economic effects around station and maintenance facility areas will be assessed by researching other comparable transportation systems to determine the degree to which economic development has occurred around station and maintenance facility areas.

### ***Construction Impacts***

Construction impacts can include disruption of traffic patterns, traffic congestion, noise, soil erosion, economic impacts, safety, utility disruption, and other issues. The Tier 2 EIS will identify locations along the proposed track alignment including residential, commercial, retail, and special uses areas such as hospitals, fire, police or other emergency services that are most susceptible to construction period impacts. Appropriate mitigation measures to be employed during construction will be documented.

### ***Cumulative and Indirect Effects***

Cumulative effects result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. Indirect effects are caused by the proposed action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable, such as induced changes in land use patterns, population or growth rate changes, and related effects on natural resources. The Tier 2 EIS will focus first on identifying the locations within the preferred corridor where reasonably foreseeable projects are anticipated to occur, and second, conduct a determination of potential cumulative and indirect effects associated with the alignment within the preferred corridor.

### ***Relationship of Short-term Uses versus Long-term Productivity***

An important consideration when analyzing the effects of the proposed project is to determine whether it will result in short-term environmental effects (adverse or beneficial) to the detriment of achieving long-term or maximizing productivity of these resources. The Tier 2 EIS will document tradeoffs in the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and enhancement of long-term productivity of those resources.

### ***Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources***

A commitment of resources is irreversible when primary or secondary impacts limit the future option for a resource. An irretrievable commitment refers to the use or consumption of resources that is neither renewable nor recoverable for later use by future generations. The Tier 2 EIS will identify any substantial commitment to the use of nonrenewable resources that may relate to physical changes in the environment, effects on human populations, and fiscal changes.

## **ISSUES NOT REQUIRING FURTHER ANALYSIS IN THE EIS PROCESS**

Based on the assessment completed through the initial alternatives evaluation and scoping processes, the following environmental issue areas do not require additional evaluation in the EIS process.

### ***Coastal Zones***

The project study area is not located within a coastal zone or coastal barrier and will not be addressed in the Tier 1 or Tier 2 EIS.

## **PERMITS AND APPROVALS**

A preliminary list of permits and approvals that may be required for the proposed project are included in Table 1.

**Table 1. Preliminary List of Permits and Approvals**

| <b>Agency</b>                             | <b>Permit/Approval</b>   |
|---|--|
| Federal:                                  |  |
| Federal Railroad Administration           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tier 1 EIS Approval</li><li>• Tier 1 EIS Record of Decision</li><li>• Section 4(f) Evaluation (if needed)</li><li>• Section 106 Tribal Coordination</li><li>• Section 106 Cultural Resources Determination</li><li>• Section 7 Threatened and Endangered Species Act determination</li></ul> |
| U.S. Army Corps of Engineers              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Section 404 Permit (fill in U.S. Waters)</li></ul>   |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Section 7 Threatened and Endangered Species Consultation (if needed)</li></ul>   |
| State:                                    |  |
| Minnesota Department of Transportation    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scoping Decision Document Approval</li><li>• Tier 1 EIS Approval</li><li>• Tier 1 EIS Adequacy Determination</li><li>• Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) Approvals</li></ul>  |
| Minnesota Department of Natural Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public Water Work Permit (if needed)</li><li>• Groundwater Appropriation Permit (if needed)</li></ul>  |
| Minnesota Pollution Control Agency        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction Stormwater Permit</li><li>• Section 401 Water Quality Certification</li></ul>   |
| State Historic Preservation Office        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Section 106 Consultation</li></ul>   |



## **SUMMARY OF COMMENTS**

This section provides a summary of public comments received during the scoping comment period for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan, which began on July 7, 2014 and ended on August 22, 2014.

During this time, the Draft Scoping Decision Document was published through the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) and distributed to a number of locations throughout the study area.

Public Open House meetings were also held on the following dates:

- Tuesday, July 29, 2014 in Rochester
- Wednesday, July 30, 2014 in Inver Grove Heights
- Thursday, July 31, 2014 in Kenyon

More information about these outreach efforts is included in Appendix A.

Comments were received through various methods, as noted below:

- Website: [www.goziprail.org](http://www.goziprail.org)
- Email comments to: [info@goziprail.org](mailto:info@goziprail.org)
- Voicemail: 651-366-3195
- U.S. Mail:  
Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Passenger Rail Office  
ATTN: Zip Rail  
395 John Ireland Boulevard, MS 470  
St. Paul, MN 55155

In addition to these methods, open house attendees were encouraged to provide project input on comment forms that were made available at each meeting.

A total of 302 comments were received during the scoping comment period (July 7, 2014 to August 22, 2014). The initial 30-day time period for receiving public comments for scoping was extended from August 6 to August 22 to accommodate those who needed more time to provide comments. Comments were received from agencies, cities, counties, townships, community organizations, community groups, and the general public. All comments received were compiled, analyzed, and summarized. Copies of all comments received are provided in Appendix B: Scoping Comments. Responses to the comments are also provided by comment source and by theme below.

Table 2 lists a summary of who provided comments. The majority of comments came from the general public, while comments were also received from agencies, municipalities and community organizations. Copies of news articles related to the project were also received through the project website. A total of 20 comments received were news articles. These comments are included as part of the total comment tally.

**Table 2. Summary of Type of Comment Received**

| <b>Comment Source</b>                        | <b>Number</b> |
|--|---------------|
| Agency Comments                              | 8             |
| City, County, or Township Departments/Boards | 12            |
| Public Comments                              | 282           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>302*</b>   |

*\*Note that the total number of comments does not include duplicates, mailing unsubscribe requests, and non-project related comments.*

### **Agency Comments**

Agencies providing comments on the Draft Scoping Decision Document included: US Army Corps of Engineers; US Environmental Protection Agency; Federal Highway Administration, Minnesota Division; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Minnesota Department of Transportation; Minnesota Pollution Control Agency; Metropolitan Council; and Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Comments from each agency focused on the topic or area of concern with which the agency is typically involved. The following topics received comments from agencies:

- Permitting
- Consultation and coordination with applicable agencies at various steps of the project development process
- Screening of alternatives
- Purpose and need statement
- Data sources to use to identify the existing environment
- Environmental studies and potential impacts

### **US Army Corps of Engineers**

#### **St. Paul District**

**180 Fifth Street East, Suite 700**

**St. Paul, MN 55101**

USACE Comment: If the proposal involves work in navigable waters of the United States, such as the Mississippi River or the Minnesota River, it may be subject to jurisdiction under Sections 9 and 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899. The scoping document indicates new, rehabilitated, or expanded bridge crossings of the Mississippi River or the Minnesota River may be required for this project. A Section 9 permit would be required from the U.S. Coast Guard if new, rehabilitated, or expanded bridge crossings of navigable waters of the United States are necessary for this project. Other work in navigable waters, unrelated to bridges, would require a Section 10 permit from the Corps of Engineers.

*Response: Anticipated permits required by the project will be identified in the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).*

USACE Comment: If the proposal involves the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, it may be subject to the Corps of Engineers' jurisdiction under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA Section 404). Waters of the United States include navigable waters, their tributaries, and adjacent wetlands (33 CFR § 328.3). CWA Section 301(a) prohibits discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, unless the work has been authorized by a Department of the Army permit under Section 404. Information about the Corps permitting process can be obtained online at: <http://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory.aspx>.

*Response: Anticipated Section 404 requirements as a result of the project will be identified in the Tier 1 EIS.*

USACE Comment: As the scoping document notes, this project will more than likely require a Section 404 Clean Water Act permit from the Corps of Engineers. Preliminary information on aquatic resource impacts was not provided in this document, making it difficult to comment on alternatives, but we understand an estimate of potential aquatic resource impacts will be provided using the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) and other mapping resources for each of the selected eight alternatives in the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As the NWI has not been ground-truthed, it is only an estimate of wetland locations in Minnesota, and it tends to be less reliable on cropland. The most up to date NWI should be used to make the impact estimates; there was an update to the NW1 in the Twin Cities metropolitan area in 2013 that includes Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Goodhue, and Rice Counties, among others. The most up to date information on the Minnesota NWI can be found on the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website.

The Corps' evaluation of a CWA Section 404 permit application involves multiple analyses, including (1) evaluating the proposal's impacts in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (33 CFR part 325), (2) determining whether the proposal is contrary to the public interest (33 CFR § 320.4), and (3) determining whether the proposal complies with the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (40 CFR part 230).

*Response: Anticipated wetland impacts will be evaluated in the Tier 1 EIS. Anticipated permits that will be required will also be identified in the Tier 1 EIS.*

USACE Comment: Due to the scale of this project, and the Federal Rail Administration's (FRA) intent to complete a Tier 1 EIS and Tier 2 EIS, we recommend that the Corps be included in the FRA's NEPA process to ensure that the selected preferred alternative is compatible with Section 404 Clean Water Act regulations, including the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines. The Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines specifically require that "no discharge of dredged or fill material shall be permitted if there is a practicable alternative to the proposed discharge which would have less adverse impact on the aquatic ecosystem, so long as the alternative does not have other significant adverse environmental consequences" (40 CFR § 230.10(a)).

We would expect that the NEPA/404 merger process that the Corps developed with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration would be utilized for this project. The NEPA/404 merger process has three concurrence points that can be completed during the FRA's NEPA review process, including purpose and need, alternatives carried forward, and the selected alternative. There is also a concurrence point for design phase impact minimization. The goal of the NEPA/404 merger process is to maximize efficiency and predictability by aligning the NEPA and CWA Section 404 reviews and be positioned to issue the CWA Section 404 permit shortly after completing the EIS record of decision. That being said, obtaining Corps concurrence at a particular point in the process does not ensure that a Corps permit will be issued; it only indicates that the information developed to date is sufficient that the Corps can agree to move on to the next stage of project development. We would also be willing to participate as a cooperating agency on the FRA's EIS.

*Response: The NEPA/404 merger process will be utilized for the project. Coordination with the USACE will occur throughout the EIS process, specifically at the noted concurrence points. FRA will issue invitations to cooperating agencies early in the Tier 1 EIS process.*

**US EPA Region 5  
NEPA Implementation Section  
77 W. Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, IL 60604**

To assist the FRA and MnDOT in enhancing the next phases of this project, and to focus the Draft Tier 1 EIS analysis, EPA provides the following comments:

USEPA Comment: 1. Updated consultation records and information pertaining to required permits need to be addressed. This project may need coordination with several agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and other state and federal agencies. The scoping document indicates that the project has potential issues, including waterway crossings, bridge repairs and upgrading, wetland impacts, and floodplain fill, among others, which will require coordination and permitting from the relevant agencies. The scoping document states that these concerns will be addressed throughout the engineering process so as to minimize the negative impacts. In future NEPA documents for this project, up-to-date coordination letters, agreements, permit requirements, and any other relevant information should be presented.

*Response: The scale and setting of the project will require multiple permits and coordination with state and federal agencies will occur throughout the Tier 1 EIS process. FRA will issue invitations to cooperating agencies early in the Tier 1 EIS process. The Tier 1 EIS will identify the potential permits that may be required as a result of the project. Coordination letters, cooperative agreements, permit requirements, and any other relevant information pertaining to required permits for the project will be identified.*

USEPA Comment: 2. The scoping document notes that there is the potential for conflict with freight rail, passenger rail and other modes of transportation. We advise that MnDOT and FRA consult with providers of the other modes of transportation to avoid or accommodate potential areas of congestions or conflict in designing flyovers, at grade crossings, etc. This coordination should be documented in future NEPA documents.

*Response: FHWA and freight railroads are included in the stakeholder list. Coordination with state and federal agencies will occur throughout the Tier 1 EIS process to avoid and minimize conflicts.*

USEPA Comment: 3. In the alternatives analysis, FRA and MnDOT should explain why some alternatives are removed from consideration or retained for further analysis. This can be useful in documenting the reasons for the preferred alternative and the impacts that are associated with each alternative. A detailed analysis of the alternatives screening methodology should be included in future documents.

*Response: A summary of the screening analysis criteria is included in the Final Scoping Decision document. The alternatives screening process will be included in the Tier 1 EIS as part of the 'Alternatives Considered' discussion.*

USEPA Comment: 4. The scoping document also mentions the potential options for end termini of the rail line but there is no discussion of any intermediate stops or stations along the rail line. What will be the screening factors for alternate end termini and where will potential intermediate additional stops be located? Also, how will this rail corridor provide connectivity into either of the main end termini? How will this connect Rochester and the Twin Cities to other areas and cities in the region? Will the chosen end termini be a hub for other high speed rail lines? The termini/station analysis should include noise, air emissions (especially diesel), storm water run-off, parking, integration with local transit, implications for local traffic, and any impacts to sensitive populations.

*Response: Potential station location access and connectivity will be evaluated in the Tier 1 EIS. Specific station sites would be evaluated in Tier 2.*

USEPA Comment: 5. The scoping documents mention that there are several historical properties in the study area. Those include areas surrounding the historic village of Mendota and the Nansen District of historic Norwegian settlements. In future NEPA documents, current information pertaining to coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) should be included. Once the final layout of track lines and facility placement are determined, the analysis and possible mitigation for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act should be completed and included in future documents.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will document all known and eligible historic and archaeological properties and will document all Section 106 coordination and activities. Field survey would be undertaken when a preferred corridor and track alignment are identified in Tier 2.*

USEPA Comment: 6. Air quality analysis for this project should examine idling time at these stations, and the associated emissions of the locomotives while idling, land use/human population at that location, and the baseline air quality conditions (attainment/non-attainment/maintenance) at those stops. EPA invites FRA to use of spatial data tools such as NEPAassist (<http://nepassisttool.epa.gov/nepassist/entry.aspx>) to help convey the potential impact of rail system pollutant sources upon receptors near these stops.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will summarize representative monitoring data and determine if a detailed air quality assessment is required. Detailed analyses will be conducted during at the Tier 2 EIS when a preferred corridor and alignment have been identified. The NEPAassist tool will be utilized to assist in the evaluation of air quality analysis. Please refer to the **Issues to be Addressed in the Tier 1 EIS** section of the Final Scoping Decision Document for more detail.*

**FHWA Minnesota Division  
380 Jackson Street, Suite 500  
St. Paul, MN 55101-4802**

FHWA Comment: 1. As the project comes together and more information becomes known, we are available and willing to participate in the two-tier EIS project coordination to streamline the process, if the need for any future FHWA action becomes apparent (such as Interstate Access Approval, or the need to grant obligation authority for the Federal-Aid Highway Program).

*Response: FRA will issue invitations to cooperating agencies early in the Tier 1 EIS process.*

## 2. Scoping and Outreach

FHWA Comment: a) The scoping process is supposed to include issues of concern identified by regulatory agencies as part of the outreach and coordination efforts. This document does not mention any attempts as such outreach other than a meeting with FAA. Were there any attempts at outreach to agencies like the Corps of Engineers, USFWS, or the Minnesota DNR? If so, what was learned as part of that process?

*Response: On August 15, 2013, MnDOT hosted an Agency and Governmental Coordination meeting to gather information relative for environmental scoping within the Federal process. Representatives from the FAA, the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and Minnesota Departments of Health, Pollution Control and Agriculture attended. Other agencies including the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the US Environmental Protection Agency were also invited to this meeting. Specific feedback received at the August 15, 2013 meeting included general questions regarding project timing and scope. Maps with the universe of alternatives were presented and comments solicited. In addition, in July 2014, all of the same agencies received copies and were requested to comment on the Scoping Booklet and the Draft Scoping Decision Document.*



FHWA Comment: b) What efforts did FRA take to identify and invite cooperating and participating agencies for the NEPA process? If efforts were undertaken, which agencies were approached/identified? If none were approached, why not?

*Response: FRA issued a Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS for this project on May 13, 2013. FRA will issue invitations to cooperating agencies early in the Tier 1 EIS process. All agencies included in the August 15, 2013 Agency and Governmental Coordination meeting, as well as all cities and counties and Indian tribes with interest in the counties through which the Zip Rail alternatives run, were invited to comment on the alternatives and the state scoping process by receiving a copy of the Scoping Booklet and Draft Scoping Decision Document for this project.*

FHWA Comment: c) The sphere of scoping to date and the outlined scope of work for the Tier I EIS appear to focus solely on operations. The current scope of work does not appear to include the locations (or obvious accommodation) of storage/staging/fleet maintenance operations. Is that anticipated to fit within the width of corridors already identified and then solely part of the Tier II endeavor?

*Response: Potential locations for storage and maintenance facilities would be evaluated as part of the Tier 2 EIS after a preferred alternative has been identified. Additional environmental analysis would be conducted at the Tier 2 EIS level if any facilities are located outside the identified corridors.*

FHWA Comment: 3. Page 1: "...these corridors would be sealed, with no at-grade crossings." Clarify whether both tunnels and bridges are being considered to provide grade separation, or just bridges are assumed.

*Response: Tier 1 EIS efforts are considering corridors and the potential for impacts within these areas. Specific strategies for any necessary grade separation would be determined in Tier 2.*

FHWA Comment: a) The P/N tells us what you want to build (specific design outcome). It should tell us what transportation problems need to be solved.

*Response: The project purpose is to provide expanded transportation options through passenger rail service in this corridor. The transportation need is to provide this service to accommodate population, employment and economic growth in a safe and convenient manner. The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) and Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan already indicate that passenger rail service is part of long range transportation planning efforts in the State of Minnesota.*

FHWA Comment: b) The P/N presumes that rail is the only answer to the transportation problems whereas the purpose and need statement is intended to allow for a reasonable range of alternatives to be studied in a NEPA process. If previous studies indicate that highways will not fulfill that need and rail is the only viable solution...fine. Then potential rail solutions constitute the reasonable range of alternatives.

*Response: Previous studies evaluated potential transportation solutions that would meet the purpose and need. These reports can be found on the project website, including three Tri-State High Speed Rail Studies, the Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan and the Preliminary Economic Benefit Analysis of the Proposed Rochester Twin Cities High Speed Passenger Rail Program. Potential rail solutions have been evaluated as a range of alternatives in these previous studies.*

*This project will be completed in cooperation with the FRA, which is the federal agency charged with delivery of high speed rail projects. The FRA approach to alternatives analysis considers passenger rail corridors that would provide a reliable and safe passenger rail transportation alternative that is convenient and cost effective and would serve the forecasted population and economic growth demands of the corridor. The evaluation of other modes of transportation for these corridors would be considered as potential mode choices under the No-Build alternative.*

FHWA Comment: c) The “increase in population and employment” is, at best, speculative. Recommend focusing need elements that lead to reliably measurable evaluation criteria such as travel time, people moved, trip reliability, etc.

*Response: The complete purpose and need statement is available at <http://goziprail.org/info-center/> and provides more detailed information, including data indicating population and employment growth in Rochester and Southeast Minnesota and the Twin Cities. Travel time, reliability and ridership will be studied in the Service Development Plan in conjunction with the Tier 1 EIS.*

FHWA Comment: d) “The existing roadway system in the corridor is anticipated to experience capacity needs resulting from current and future economic growth; a rail option would provide a means to address those needs into the future.” While this might not be the place to address it, this raises the question of whether air travel is an alternative that could meet at least part of the needs. Regarding the corridor capacity, is that at full build out, the No-Build alternative described on Page 6 (planned or programmed in the next 20 years), or the current configuration?

*Response: This project was developed from the Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan, which identified plans for a future passenger rail system. Several studies have evaluated the feasibility of passenger rail service prior to this project, including three Tri-State High Speed Rail Studies, the Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan and the Preliminary Economic Benefit Analysis of the Proposed Rochester Twin Cities High Speed Passenger Rail Program.*

*A comprehensive travel demand model is being developed as part of the Service Development Plan using the latest socio-economic, traffic volumes (air, bus, and auto) and updated network data (e.g., gas prices) to test the likely ridership response to rail service improvements over*

*time. The ridership and revenue estimates are sensitive to trip purpose, frequencies, travel times, fuel cost and other trip attributes.*

FHWA Comment: e) What is the planning horizon for this document for high speed rail, is it 20 years same as highway projects that the public is somewhat accustomed to? This needs to be made more clear in the introduction and P/N because that will inform your Tier 1 evaluation criteria.

*Response: The planning horizon is 20 years to 2035; this will be utilized in Tier 1 evaluation criteria.*

FHWA Comment: f) Note that more clarity of project needs could affect the pre-screening of alternatives described in the first paragraph of page 8.

*Response: A summary of the screening analysis criteria is included in the Final Scoping Decision Document and will clarify the relationship of project needs in alternative identification and evaluation. The alternatives screening process will be included in the Tier 1 EIS as part of the 'Alternatives Considered' discussion.*

FHWA Comment: a) The current screening criteria do not appear to consider how a given corridor/alignment might impact the visions in place for other modes of transportation. For example, was 'Consistency with Local Planning' limited to city and county documented development or did it include MnDOT visions for roadways such as Highway 52 as well? Statewide or corridor level roadway visions are typically not considered 'local plans'.

*Response: The Level 2 screening considered local transportation and development plans that could affect project development. MnDOT projects were included in this review of projects. The Tier 1 EIS will further evaluate each of the alternatives studied for consistency with MnDOT and local planning efforts.*

FHWA Comment: b) Does the public understand the meaning of "high level of analysis", that it means "not a high level of detail" – or do they think it means "a lot of analysis"? (This terminology is also used in the earlier part of the document).

*Response: This phrase will be revised in the Final Scoping Decision Document to clarify the level of analysis that will be presented in the Tier 1 EIS.*

FHWA Comment: c) Level 1 screening: Although the introduction to this section of the document indicates these are intended to be general criteria (we assume that means more of a qualitative nature), it is not clear how these criteria were applied to the alternatives. Were they screened high/medium/low, for example? What were the values or characteristics being looked for?

*Response: A summary of the screening analysis criteria will be included in the Final Scoping Decision Document. The alternatives screening process will be included in the Tier 1 EIS as part of the 'Alternatives Considered' discussion.*

FHWA Comment: 8. Page 15: The right-of-way and relocations considerations appear to limit consideration to residential and displaced businesses. Considering the extent of greenfield expansion anticipated with this project and that, by common practice, farms are not typically considered residential areas or businesses...how do you plan to address the potential bisection or remnant creation of farmland over such a large corridor?

*Response: The amount of farmland potentially impacted by project corridors will be assessed in the Tier 1 EIS. The analysis in the Tier 2 EIS will focus on the specific farmland impacts, the potential number of residential and displaced businesses and also identify properties that may be impacted.*

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Ecological and Water Resources  
500 Lafayette Road  
St. Paul MN 55155**

MnDNR Comment: Alternatives that avoid DNR administered lands should be developed and included in the Tier 1 EIS. DNR administered lands include Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific and Natural Areas, State Parks, Aquatic Management Areas, and State Trails. The maps included in the Scoping Booklet did not contain all of the DNR Administered Lands in the project area. Please use the DNR Data Deli (<http://deli.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html>) to locate all of the DNR Administered Lands within the project area. Due to the long environmental review period for this project it is also likely that additional lands will be acquired by the DNR. The Prairie Creek WMA, SW of Dennison, was added to the DNR GIS layer on June 18, 2014 and does not appear on the Scoping Booklet map. Other resources of note include: Goodhue County – Lake Byllesby Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA), RJ Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest and Olmsted County – Natural Area Registry Site Oxbow County Park

*Response: MnDNR administered lands will be identified during the Tier 1 EIS using the secondary source information provided. Field investigations, to accompany secondary source reviews as needed, may also yield additional lands in the study area. As new lands are added to the database, they will also be added to the list of resources that will be assessed for potential impacts within the corridors.*

MnDNR Comment: In addition, alternatives should avoid areas of high conservation value, including Native Prairie Bank and Reinvest in Minnesota easements, US Fish and Wildlife Service easements, native prairie fragments, Big Woods Heritage Forest sites, Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SBS) and Central Region Regionally Significant Ecological Areas (CRRSEA).

SBS have varying levels of native biodiversity and are ranked based on the relative significance of this biodiversity at a statewide level. Sites ranked as Outstanding contain the best occurrences of the rarest species, the most outstanding examples of the rarest native plant communities, and/or the largest, most intact functional landscapes present in the state. CRRSEA have significant terrestrial and wetland resources that support a variety of plant and animal species, and provide habitat connectivity to other ecologically intact areas. The purpose of the data is to inform regional scale land use decisions, especially as it relates to balancing development and natural resource protection.

*Response: Special and sensitive lands will be identified and assessed during the Tier 1 EIS.*

MnDNR Comment: The DNR requests that a Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) review be conducted to determine the location of records of rare species or rare natural resource features that are located in proximity to the project. The NHIS is continually updated as new information becomes available and would include current records and surveys. An NHIS review is considered valid if performed within one year of project implementation. Please reference ERDB project number 20140398 in NHIS correspondence. If impacts to rare species or rare natural features are identified by the review, surveys may be requested by the DNR Endangered Species program. The NHIS Data Request form and rate information can be accessed on the DNR website at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nhnrp/nhis.html>.

*Response: The Natural Heritage Information System database will be reviewed and assessed during Tier 1 EIS studies to locate records of rare species or rare natural resource features.*

MnDNR Comment: The Tier 1 EIS should address impacts to wildlife travel corridors, collisions, etc. due to the sealed corridor design and use of fencing for the project. We recommend that the design incorporate wildlife passage at numerous critical locations, most of which will be associated with streams or wetlands. The DNR will provide more specific guidance on wildlife travel corridors as the project becomes more defined.

*Response: Wildlife travel corridors affected by project corridor alternatives will be studied in the Tier 1 EIS, and coordination with the MnDNR is anticipated.*

MnDNR Comment: We recommend all vegetation activities incorporate native species appropriate to each area. The native plant species should include flowering plants that are used by pollinators. The DNR can provide guidance on the establishment and maintenance of pollinator plantings at a later date. The vegetation plan should include the use of wildlife-friendly erosion control materials in order to reduce mortality to wildlife.

Riparian corridors of rivers and streams are particularly sensitive to the influences of transportation infrastructure on water and soil resources and wildlife corridor fragmentation. Please consider the local ordinances developed to protect the Mississippi River Critical Area on Mississippi River crossings, trout streams such as the Little Cannon River in Goodhue County,

and waters with protected mussel species such as Cascade Creek and Zumbro River in Olmsted County.

*Response: Local ordinances will be reviewed as part of the analysis in the Tier 1 EIS and used to identify potential impacts. Consultation and coordination with the MnDNR on vegetation and wildlife information is anticipated.*

MnDNR Comment: This project will impact a number of wetlands regulated by the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). Some of these may qualify as “rare natural communities” under Minnesota Rule 8420.0515, Subpart 3, which states that a wetland replacement plan for activities that modify a rare natural community must be denied if the local government unit determines that the proposed activities will permanently adversely affect the natural community. The NHIS review discussed previously will assist in identifying these specially protected wetlands.

*Response: Wetland acreages in the project corridors will be identified in the Tier 1 EIS. Rare natural communities or other special considerations as identified in Minnesota Rule 8420-0515, Subpart 3 will be considered in accordance with WCA requirements.*

MnDNR Comment: This is a preliminary review of the project based on the large scale maps contained within the Scoping Booklet. The DNR can provide a more detailed response when the corridor shapefiles are provided to our agency. The DNR recommends the shapefiles be provided prior to the issuance of the Tier 1 DEIS. A meeting should be held with our agency to discuss potential impacts so they can be more appropriately addressed in the Tier 1 DEIS.

*Response: Consultation with the MnDNR will occur early in the Tier 1 EIS process, and applicable shapefiles will be submitted to the MnDNR for review and comment. The results and coordination with the MnDNR will then be documented in the Tier 1 Draft EIS.*

**Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Metro Division  
395 John Ireland Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155**

MnDOT Comment: MnDOT is well represented in the scoping and review process. MnDOT layouts will be required for any proposed plans that have significant impact to MnDOT highways. As this plan moves forward, Design will be able to review specific design elements.

*Response: MnDOT will coordinate any internal discussions necessary in order to inform corridor analysis efforts in the Tier 1 EIS.*

**Minnesota Pollution Control Agency  
520 Lafayette Road North  
St. Paul, MN 55155**

MPCA Comment: As you are aware, the project will require a Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification or waiver from the MPCA to verify compliance with state water quality standards. For further information about the 401 Water Quality Certification process, please contact Jim Brist at 651-757-2245 or Bill Wilde at 651-757-2825.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this project. Please be aware that this letter does not constitute approval by the MPCA of any or all elements of the Project for the purpose of pending or future permit action(s) by the MPCA. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Project proposer to secure any required permits and to comply with any requisite permit conditions.

*Response: As part of the Tiered NEPA process, all necessary permits will be identified. The project team will coordinate with the MPCA to secure a Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification or waiver following the Tier 2 EIS.*

**Metropolitan Council  
390 Robert Street North  
St. Paul, MN 55101**

Metropolitan Council Comment: *Transportation (Russ Owen, 651-602-1724)*

The Metropolitan Council develops the Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) for the 7-county metropolitan area, which represents the Council's policies and plans to guide development of the region's transportation system to the year 2030, including a plan for transitways in the region. While the Zip Rail project is not confined to the metropolitan area, it is important to make a connection between this project and light rail transit (LRT) somewhere in the metropolitan area. The 2030 transitway system map in the TPP (Fig 7-43) includes two regional multimodal hubs, at St Paul Union Depot and Target Field in Minneapolis and both MSP and the Mall of America also have multimodal transit centers. Different alternatives for a LRT connection will have different impacts on the environment and transportation system such as complementing or duplicating the LRT system.

The project team should continue to coordinate with the Metropolitan Council, the county regional rail authorities, and communities regarding Zip Rail interface with ongoing metropolitan area transitway corridor studies, specifically the Robert St. Riverview corridor studies.

The TPP also describes the region's highway and aviation systems. The 2030 aviation system plan does not show any intercity passenger rail access into the airport, and reflects airport ground access only via transit and highways. Any ZIP Rail alternative that accesses MSP airport via I-494 and TH 5 should be carefully examined to assure construction of ZIP rail does not cause any negative impacts on these regional systems, including the airport itself and nearby principal arterial highways, which include I-494 and TH 5, 55, 62 and 77.



*Response: The Tier 1 EIS scheduled for completion in 2015 would identify the preferred corridor for the project. The Tier 2 EIS would be required to determine the actual right-of-way, crossings, alignment and locations of stops within the corridor. The project team will continue to consult with the Metropolitan Council, Metropolitan Airports Commission, MnDOT Metro District, cities, counties and other agencies with jurisdiction in studying connections in the vicinity of the airport in the Tier 1 EIS process. Alignments and access changes will be evaluated in the Tier 2 EIS.*

Metropolitan Council Comment: *Regional Parks (Jan Youngquist, (651-602-1029)*

The Metropolitan Council oversees the Regional Parks System in the 7-county metropolitan area, which is governed and protected by the Council's Regional Parks Policy Plan. The Regional Parks Policy Plan also affords protection to recreational open space provided by federal and state government within the metropolitan area. The Council does not own or operate any Regional Parks System facilities, however. The Council partners with ten regional park implementing agencies that own and operate the regional parks and trails.

The Zip Line Scoping Booklet and Draft Scoping Decision Document includes a section listing "Park and Recreational Properties" within the study area. The list does not include all of the Regional Parks System facilities or state and federal recreational lands that are located within or near the study area. The list below indicates the Regional Parks System or state/federal facilities within the 7-county metropolitan area that may be impacted by the Zip Rail route, followed by the applicable implementing agency.

Northern Segment-Coates to Twin Cities Terminals: MSP and/or Union Depot

- Rosemount Greenway Regional Trail (Dakota County planned trail)
- Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail (Dakota County planned trail)
- Mississippi National River and Recreation Area-MNRRRA Critical Area (MN Department of Natural Resources, National Park Service, Metropolitan Council)

MSP Options:

- Big Rivers/Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail (Dakota County)
- Fort Snelling State Park (MN Department of Natural Resources)
- Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (US Fish & Wildlife Services)
- Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail (Three Rivers Park District)
- Intercity Regional Trail (Three Rivers Park District)

Union Depot Options:

- Mississippi River Regional Trail (Dakota County)
- North Urban Regional Trail (Dakota County)
- Samuel Morgan Regional Trail (Saint Paul)
- Lilydale-Harriet Island-Cherokee Heights Regional Park (Saint Paul)
- Battle Creek Regional Park (Ramsey County and Saint Paul)
- Bruce Vento Regional Trail and Nature Sanctuary (Saint Paul)
- Trout Brook Regional Trail (Saint Paul planned trail)

Southern Segment-Coates to Downtown Rochester:

- Vermillion Highlands Wildlife Management Area (MN Department of Natural Resources)
- Whitetail Woods Regional Park (Dakota County)
- Lake Byllesby Regional Park (Dakota County)
- Mill Towns State Trail (MN Department of Natural Resources planned trail)

These recreational facilities are considered Section 4(f) resources and will need to be evaluated as part of the Tier I EIS. Additionally, projects with impacts to regional parks and trails will need to comply with the policies and strategies outlined in the Council's Regional Parks Policy Plan. There are instances where regional parks and trails are located adjacent to existing rail corridors identified as potential route segments, such as the Mississippi River Regional Trail and Battle Creek Regional Park in Ramsey County. The limited rights-of-way and proximity to existing Regional Parks System facilities may make planning for the Zip Rail difficult. The Section 4(f) evaluation will need to examine ways to avoid or minimize impact to these, and all, of the recreational facilities listed above. In addition, there might be Section 6(f) lands that will need to be evaluated for impacts.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will identify all park and recreational properties within or adjacent to corridors under study and will also identify Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) properties.*

Metropolitan Council Comment: *Environmental Services (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119)*

The construction of any new or updating of existing rail lines may have an impact on multiple Metropolitan Council interceptors in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system, prior to initiating any proposed project, preliminary plans should be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager (651-602-4503) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment.

*Response: The location of utilities will be included in the Tier 1 EIS and coordination with agencies will occur throughout the EIS process.*

### **Metropolitan Airports Commission**

*Comment:* Acting on behalf of the Metropolitan Airports Commission and as a member of the Technical Advisory Committee for Zip Rail, I have reviewed the Tier 1 Scoping Decision Documents. We have no comments regarding the document in and of itself. The series of meetings for the TAC and separate ones with ourselves and the FAA have brought to light elements of this process that have been highlighted in the Scoping document as items that will require further discussion and study as part of the Tier 2 process. We appreciate the interaction of the group and look forward to working together as we enter the Tier 2 phase of the project.

*Response: Consultation and coordination with the Metropolitan Airports Commission and other agencies will continue through the Tier 1 EIS process.*

## **Municipal Comments**

Written statements were received from the following municipalities and organizations: Dakota County Board of Commissioners; Dodge County Regional Rail Authority; Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority; City of Bloomington, Port Authority Administrator; City of Cannon Falls, Director of Economic Development and Planning; City of Hampton; City of Inver Grove Heights; City of Pine Island, Mayor; City of Rosemount; City of Zumbrota, Mayor; Belle Creek Township, Township Board; and Wasioja Township.

The subject of comments from municipalities included, but is not limited to, the following:

- Station locations and sites
- Locations where the new rail line could connect to other modes of transportation
- Inclusion of other modes of transportation into the NEPA process and alternative evaluation
- Service development plan
- Screening of alternatives
- Coordination with communities and organizations throughout the project for review and input
- Environmental resources that will be evaluated in the Tier 1 and Tier 2 EIS
- Specific impacts, positive and negative, to communities within the corridors of the project based on route alignment
- Effect of changed roadway access on emergency services, travel time, and farming industry

### **Dakota County Board of Commissioners**

Dakota County has the following priority comments and concerns:

Dakota County Comment: The scoping booklet identifies consideration of a "southern" Dakota County intermediate station. Dakota County considers such a station to be an essential element of the proposed project. Since the majority of the planned growth in Dakota County is identified in the northern third of the county, we suggest that "northern or central Dakota County" be used to describe the location of the intermediate station.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS process and Service Development Plan will further study the need for, and potential location of, a Dakota County station.*

Dakota County Comment: On Page 1 of the scoping booklet, in the fourth paragraph, specific details are provided for some of the expected design and operating characteristics for the Zip Rail. Providing this level of detail may be seen as pre-determining the project rather than utilizing the NEPA scoping process to identify the preferred alternative and associated characteristics. Also, the document should identify how other modes, other types of rail service, and a No-Build alternative will be considered in the NEPA process. An alternative that uses the Hwy 52 corridor to enter St. Paul directly from the south does not appear to have been studied along with the earlier alternatives in the screening process. All corridors should be evaluated to make the best informed choice for a preferred alternative.

*Response: The project will be completed in cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), which is the federal agency charged with delivery of high speed rail projects. The FRA approach to alternatives analysis considers passenger rail corridors that would provide a reliable and safe passenger rail transportation alternative that is convenient and cost effective and would serve the forecasted population and economic growth demands of the corridor. The evaluation of other modes of transportation for these corridors would be considered as potential mode choices under the No-Build Alternative. The expected design and operating characteristics included in the scoping package are presented as guidelines for use in evaluating potential corridors that would meet the purpose and need. More detail regarding operation of this service will be conducted in the Service Development Plan, which will be prepared concurrent with the Tier 1 EIS.*

Dakota County Comment: Page 13 of the scoping booklet states the possibility of connecting to Minneapolis from a northern Zip Rail terminus at the Union Depot via a future high-speed rail connection. MnDOT is currently conducting a Tier 1 EIS for Minneapolis to Chicago high-speed rail service, which is considering routing alternatives to Target Station from the Union Depot. MnDOT has noted that they are particularly sensitive to prospective local use of the planned service and the impact it may have on capacity needs. These two planning efforts should be coordinated.

*Response: MnDOT is also managing the Minneapolis to Chicago high-speed rail service project, and will ensure that it is coordinated with the planning for this project. Connectivity of the Zip Rail project with other projects and other transportation modes will be addressed in the Tier 1 EIS and the Service Development Plan.*

Dakota County Comment: On Page 18 of the scoping booklet the document states, "... given the scope of the proposed project alternatives it is anticipated there would be some impacts associated with changes in vehicular traffic volumes or traffic congestion, Depending on the alternative, there would also be changes in roadway access including potential to sever existing local roads. However, it is expected that higher level roadways, including state and county roads, would not be affected. Ongoing coordination would occur with the cities and counties along the corridors to recognize current and future roadway plans that could work in conjunction with rail planning." Please address the following to clarify this statement:

- Describe the definition of "higher level roadways would not be affected." Does this statement mean all higher level roadways would be grade separated with overpasses?
- We encourage future study efforts to address the complete roadway network, including future alignments and local roadways, to identify future traffic patterns. The roadway network operates as a system and any roads that are severed may have an impact to traffic on the State and County systems.

*Response: Roadway impacts resulting from the proposed project would be identified and considered in evaluation and identification of a preferred corridor in the Tier 1 EIS.*

Transportation and Transit Comments and Potential Impact on County Roads:  
General Comments Pertaining to the Scoping Booklet

Dakota County Comment: On Page 4, both high speed rail and passenger rail service are referenced in identification of the project scope. Consistent terminology should be used in framing this planning effort.

*Response: The terminology is now clearly defined in the Final Scoping Decision document.*

Dakota County Comment: On Page 5, the primary connections between Rochester and the Twin Cities are identified as automobile connections. The document should also identify existing intercity bus service, Mayo Clinic employee shuttles, or other significant transportation modes linking Rochester with the Twin Cities.

*Response: Connections that are to be considered will be discussed in the Service Development Plan, which will be completed concurrently with the Tier 1 EIS.*

Dakota County Comment: On Pages 8 and 9, the criteria used to screen approximately 1200 initial alternative combinations to just 8 remaining alternatives through Level 1 and Level 2 screening processes are identified. However, there is no specific information on why corridor alternatives were eliminated. Additional information on the primary factors for elimination alternatives should be provided. This may be most easily done with summary type material included in an appendix.

*Response: The alternatives screening process will be included in the Tier 1 EIS as part of the 'Alternatives Considered' discussion.*

Dakota County Comment: On Page 9, it is stated that the reduction in alternatives from Level 1 screenings included input from cities. We believe this is misleading since very few cities along the proposed project alignment were involved with the screening process. As planning efforts continue for this corridor, we strongly encourage continued involvement of all cities and townships in the vicinity of the proposed project. This is critically important in Dakota County where land use authority is the responsibility of local jurisdictions, not the County.

*Response: The project team made several presentations to local officials within the study area throughout 2014. In addition, the project team reached out to every county and municipality within the project study area offering to meet with their respective organizations. Counties, cities, townships, and other jurisdictions with authority over portions of potential corridors will be engaged during the Tier 1 EIS process.*

Dakota County Comment: On Pages 10-12, definitions of the remaining alternatives include possibilities for terminating a route at the St. Paul Union Depot. The potential for these alternatives should be evaluated in consideration of freight rail needs and improvements

identified by the East Metro Capacity Study completed by the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority.

*Response: Other existing and planned projects within the study area will be considered in the evaluation of potential alternatives during the Tier 1 EIS process.*

Dakota County Comment: On Page 12, alternatives that extend through Rosemount and Inver Grove Heights are identified. Dakota County is in the process of conducting the Arterial Connector Study - Pine Bend Area that will address future arterial roadway needs in Rosemount and Inver Grove Heights including CSAH 71. We encourage future work on this project to be closely coordinated with Dakota County, as the Cities of Rosemount and Inver Grove Heights work on this arterial study.

*Response: Other existing and planned projects within the study area will be considered in the evaluation of potential alternatives during the Tier 1 EIS process.*

Dakota County Comment: Page 21 states that the Tier 1 EIS process will be completed in 2015. Our understanding of the tiered EIS process, engineering work, and public and agency involvement necessary to adequately address the NEPA requirements for a project of this magnitude is likely to take much longer than the time frame identified.

*Response: The anticipated timeline for a typical Tier 1 EIS is consistent with completing this level of work for the project. After completion of the Tier 1 EIS, the project would continue into a more detailed evaluation (Tier 2 EIS) on a preferred alternative. The project timeline could be extended for various reasons. Stakeholders and the public will be notified of the timeline throughout the project development process.*

Dakota County Comment:

Comments Pertaining to the Scoping Booklet and the Draft Scoping Decision Document

- The location of a potential Dakota County station, and impact on operations should be carefully evaluated during the Tier 1 EIS. We strongly encourage coordination with Dakota County, the adjacent cities and the UMore planned development to maximize opportunities associated with this station location.
- The scale of the maps within both the booklet and decision document makes interpretation of the map information very difficult, often with various alternatives stacked on top of each other. Please improve the quality of the maps and provide better differentiation of the corridors.
- Both the booklet and decision document are unclear about the spatial relationship of the Trunk Highway (TH) 52 corridor options to TH 52. Document text refers to statements such as "adjacent to or within TH 52..." or "essentially parallel to TH 52..." for these alignment options. While this may be appropriate for the scale of this study, better descriptions need to be included indicating that these alignments are not necessarily within or adjacent to the highway and could be quite a distance from the TH 52 right of way and have the potential to create severed land between the two corridors.

- There is limited information about the anticipated speed or range of speed, of operation. This information should be clearly identified for the various segments moving into the Tier 1 EIS. Information should also be included about what this implies for potential design elements including: alignment radii, sealed corridor, grade crossings and other prominent design features.
- Both the booklet and decision document should include a better description of how connections at the end of the line are made. Although it is recognized that the current level analysis includes wide, general corridors, the scale of the maps makes it impossible to know how the remaining alignments may fit within the densely developed areas adjacent to each termini option.
- Strong consideration must be given as to how the proposed project interacts with the Twin Cities planned regional transitway system and other transit connections. This consideration must include opportunities for coordination and connection with the regional system and assurance that transit services are not planned in a redundant fashion.
- The scoping booklet and decision document do not identify the potential loss of tax revenue resulting from the conversion of private property to rail right of way, nor does it propose to evaluate the potential loss of tax revenue associated with severing tax parcels in ways that limit their future use. These tax implications are important to local units of government and need to be addressed.
- There are few references to funding sources in the scoping booklet and decision document. Funding sources and levels should be described in more detail in the Tier 1 draft EIS, along with whether there are expectations for local units of government to provide funding.
- There are a number of large, expensive, and difficult to move utility corridors spanning Dakota County (CAPX 2020, MinnCan). The draft EIS should describe how the proposed high speed rail corridor will be located with respect to these corridors.
- Noise and vibration have been identified in the scoping booklet and decision document as issues requiring more detailed analysis. Noise and vibration issues are of great concern and should be studied thoroughly. Noise levels at the time of passing trains should be studied in addition to noise levels averaged over a period of time.

*Response: Information presented in the scoping document is at a corridor level. More detailed mapping will be shown in the Tier 1 EIS. Additional information that will address the details noted in the comment will be considered as the project develops and evaluates potential corridors and termini in the Tier 1 EIS.*

Dakota County Comment: Waste Regulation

The Dakota County Environmental Resources Department keeps an extensive list of hazardous waste generators, regulated waste management facilities, unlicensed waste disposal dumps, and petroleum/chemical release sites. The rail corridor will likely cross many of these types of sites. When the final route is defined, Dakota County will be able to provide thorough environmental records for the impacted parcels.



*Response: Information on hazardous materials, facilities and sites will be included in the Tier 1 EIS and coordination with agencies such as the Dakota County Environmental Resources Department is anticipated.*

Dakota County Comment: Land Conservation

The Figure 2 map only includes parks and State Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). The legend should be expanded to include parks and other protected lands such as State Scientific and Natural Areas and State Aquatic Management Areas. The current Vermillion Highlands polygon does not include Whitetail Wood Regional Park or some of the more recent or pending acquisitions.

Both routes south of Coates (U.S. 52 and MN 56) could involve protected farmland. While they mention the Natural Resources Conservation Service and significant soils, the farmland easements should also be included.

They mention a potential stop in southern Dakota County, but there is no general discussion in terms of rationale, general amenities, etc. A stop could have an impact on surrounding land use.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will identify all park and recreational and wildlife management properties within or adjacent to corridors under study. Land conservation methods and prime and unique farmland within the corridors will be identified in the Tier 1 EIS. General station locations will be identified in the Tier 1 EIS, with detailed station sites and access evaluated in the Tier 2 EIS.*

Dakota County Comment: Wells

The final corridor may cross sites that have unsealed water supply wells from existing and historical building sites in Dakota County. Given the uncertainty of the final corridor location and the size of the corridor, it is not possible at this time to identify the specific locations of suspected unused wells. Once a final corridor is determined, a detailed analysis of the corridor should be completed to identify sites with unsealed wells that may be impacted by the rail.

Dakota County Well Program staff can assist with reviews of the historic land uses and with geophysical surveys to locate buried wells, if necessary.

*Response: Information on water supply wells will be included in the Tier 1 EIS. Coordination with agencies such as the Dakota County Well Program is anticipated. After identification of the preferred corridor, the Tier 2 EIS will evaluate potential impacts and further analysis as necessary.*

Dakota County Comment: Parks and Greenways

Several regional parks, trails and greenways may be impacted including; Lake Byllesby Regional Park, Whitetail Woods Regional Park, Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Thompson County Park, Big Rivers Regional Trail, Mississippi River Regional Trail, North Urban Regional Trail,

Rosemount Greenway, and the Vermillion Highlands Greenway. Impacts to these public facilities should be carefully evaluated.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will identify all park and recreational properties within or adjacent to corridors under study and will also identify Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) properties.*

#### **Dodge County Regional Rail Authority**

Dodge County Comment: Please consider this correspondence as the Dodge County Regional Railroad's official comment in regards to the proposed Rochester - Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor Study. The Dodge County Regional Rail Authority comprised of the Dodge County Board of Commissioners have significant concern regarding the Rochester - Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor Study and formally opposes this project. As a Local Unit of Government significantly impacted by the study area and a proposed alignment, the detrimental impact to Dodge County's greenfields along with the minimal benefit this project will provide to the area are the impetus for Dodge County taking this action.

*Response: The corridors identified in the Final Scoping Decision Document will be evaluated against the No-Build alternative in the Tier 1 EIS to identify a preferred corridor. If a Build alternative is selected for further study, a specific alignment within that corridor would not be determined until the more detailed Tier 2 EIS and will involve municipalities, residents and other stakeholders throughout the study area.*

Dodge County Comment: The Dodge County Regional Rail Authority voted to oppose this project on August 19, 2014, and requests this action be reflected in the Scoping Booklet/Draft Scoping Decision Document.

*Response: All comments will be considered as the project evaluates potential alternatives. All comments received during the scoping comment period will be included in the public comment database that will be published on the project website ([www.goziprail.org](http://www.goziprail.org)) and included as an Appendix to the Final Scoping Decision Document.*

#### **Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority**

Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority Comment: The Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority (RCRRA) staff have reviewed the ZIP Rail Scoping Booklet and express strong support for establishing the Union Depot in St. Paul as the northern terminus for the following reasons:

1. The Purpose and Need statements explain that the ZIP Rail project will provide intercity travel options linking the growing population and economic centers of Rochester and the Twin Cities. Linking to Union Depot, a downtown terminal in the urban core, makes ZIP Rail more accessible to commuters and choice riders, and provides a better link to other forms of local and intercity transportation.

2. ZIP Rail can utilize an existing intercity passenger rail terminal with ample parking and passenger amenities by terminating at Union Depot. Connecting the ZIP Line directly to MSP International Airport could be very costly and could require the construction of a new passenger terminal on MSP Airport property.

3. The Scoping Document shows that Target Field Station in Minneapolis has been eliminated from consideration as an endpoint in the Twin Cities. Target Field Station and the Minneapolis market could be reached from Union Depot in St. Paul through a connection that is being studied as part of the Milwaukee - Twin Cities High Speed Rail Study.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will assess potential alternatives and termini for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor. The Tier 1 EIS will identify both positive and negative impacts of potential corridors. Compatibility with other planned or ongoing projects will be used to compare access options. The Tier 2 EIS will determine the actual right-of-way, crossings, alignment, and station sites and access within the corridor.*

**City of Bloomington, Port Authority Administrator**

City of Bloomington Comment: We generally support Zip Rail coming to the MOA Transit Station, the MSP Airport, or a light rail station nearby either of those locations. The MOA Transit Station is the busiest transit station in the State of Minnesota using any metric, and will be reconstructed as an amenity in the next few years. Funding for the \$25M reconstruction is about half committed at this time. A grant is pending which would complete the funding for the station.

If no direct connection to the MOA or airport is feasible, an alternative that should be considered is connecting to the Blue Line LRT at 494 and 34th Avenue. This would allow an transfer to LRT to go to the airport or MOA; it would of course necessitate a reconstruction of the nearby American Boulevard LRT station. I've spoken to MAC staff about this and it was an option that seemed feasible to them.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will assess potential alternatives and termini for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor. At this point, potential termini in the Twin Cities include the vicinity of MSP Airport and/or the St. Paul Union Depot. Specific station sites will be determined after a preferred corridor has been identified.*

City of Bloomington Comment: Crossing the MN river is an obvious challenge, but crossing environmental work could be combined with the Riverview Corridor (MT Route 54) which is being studied at this time also, which could become a rail line also.

*Response: Other existing and planned projects within the study area will be considered in the evaluation of potential alternatives during the Tier 1 EIS process.*

**City of Cannon Falls, Director of Economic Development and Planning**

Cannon Falls Comment: The Cannon Falls City Council and Economic Development Authority (EDA) have instructed me to offer comment on the Scoping Booklet and Draft Scoping Decision Document. Please know that although the City Council and EDA have significant questions pertaining to project need, cost and feasibility, the primary issue expressed by both pertains to the expected impact of this project to Cannon Falls. More specifically, they wonder about any benefits and/or detriments that should be anticipated in the event that the Zip Rail project is constructed in Cannon Falls or within close proximity to the community.

The City Council and EDA will appreciate receiving a response from the Department of Transportation that projects and describes the positive and negative outcomes that might be expected to impact Cannon Falls as a result of the Zip Rail project.

*Response: Communities that may be impacted by a new transportation corridor, including Cannon Falls, will be identified in the Tier 1 EIS. The environmental process will take into account whether a corridor would be within or in close proximity to Cannon Falls.*

**City of Hampton**

City of Hampton Comment: It is our understanding that the exact alignment of the rail will be determined at a later phase of the project, but it is already apparent that any alignment will have some impact on the City of Hampton given that all eight corridor alternatives include the City of Hampton within their one-mile width. It is imperative for the City's economic health and sense of community that the rail line diverts around the City rather than running through it. It was mentioned at the public meeting in Inver Grove Heights that the old Chicago Great Western Railway ROW is being considered for the ROW of the ZipRail. While such an alignment may work elsewhere along the corridor, it will not be appropriate in Hampton. Any route leading directly through Hampton will not be supported as it would be extremely detrimental to the City and would decimate the downtown. Please see that the project team emphasizes alignments that divert around the City even at this early phase of the project.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will assess the No-Build alternative and potential Build alternatives and termini for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor in order to identify a preferred corridor. The Tier 2 EIS will identify the approximate right-of-way that would be needed within the preferred corridor to accommodate the alignment for the railroad. Potential impacts to communities would be identified both in the Tier 1 corridor analysis and in the more site-specific Tier 2 alignment analysis.*

City of Hampton Comment: One issue we would like to see studied in the Tier I EIS is the issue of Emergency Services. Under the "Cumulative Potential Effects" section, we request an analysis of the type and scope of emergency response services needed in the case of a derailment or other catastrophic event. Please highlight the potential costs of upgrading or training local emergency response services for jurisdictions along the proposed corridors.

*Response: The location of emergency service providers and their access routes will be examined in the Tier 1 EIS.*

City of Hampton Comment: There are several issues concerning the City of Hampton that we are glad to be included in the scoping booklet including noise and vibrations and their impact on local agriculture and residential areas, as well as transportation access (particularly the limited amount of roadway access allowed to cross the rail line because it will be a sealed corridor). We will be paying particular interest to these sections when the Tier I EIS is complete.

*Response: Noise, vibration and transportation access will be further studied in the Tier 1 EIS.*

City of Hampton Comment: Finally, we would like to encourage the project proposers to consider adding an intermediate stop to the train line. While we understand that adding stations decreases the overall speed of the journey and we understand that Hampton is not large enough to have a station of its own, building in an intermediate stop (possibly in Rosemount or Inver Grove Heights) would open up Hampton residents to some of the benefits of rail access instead of being completely passed over.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS process and Service Development Plan will further study the need for, and potential location of, a Dakota County station.*

### **City of Inver Grove Heights**

City of Inver Grove Heights Comment: Existing Right of Way/Corridors: The City appreciates the efforts to use existing right of ways and corridors, to the extent possible, to lessen the impacts of the project on existing development and land uses.

*Response: Please refer to the **Issues to be Addressed in the Tier 1 EIS** section of this document for more detail regarding the environmental process to identify a preferred corridor. The Tier 2 EIS will determine the actual right of way within the preferred corridor.*

City of Inver Grove Heights Comment: Concord Boulevard Neighborhood: The City is concerned about the impact of the project on the Concord Boulevard Neighborhood. The neighborhood is located in the far northeast corner of Inver Grove Heights between Concord Boulevard and the Mississippi River. The neighborhood has recently experienced increased train activity and has been especially bothered by train horns and night time activity. The City is also undertaking redevelopment activities in this neighborhood. Inver Grove Heights has completed a two year planning process and is now acquiring properties in anticipation of redevelopment.

Concord Neighborhood Park Facilities: Inver Grove Heights is concerned about the impacts of the project on the regional and local park and recreational facilities in the Concord Neighborhood. It includes the Mississippi River Regional Trail, a Dakota County trailhead, the Rock Island Swing Bridge Park, and the proposed Heritage Village Park, a 60 acre riverfront community park.

Mississippi River Corridor: The City is also concerned about the impact of the project on the Mississippi River Corridor. The sensitivity of this unique area is reflected in the numerous federal, state, and local regulations, including floodplain, critical area, and shoreland ordinances.

Marcott Chain of Lakes: Inver Grove Heights is concerned about the impact of the project on the Marcott Chain of Lakes. This series of lakes, stretching along the south side of Highway 55, are identified on various environmental inventories because of their natural beauty and outstanding water quality.

The open house presentation mentioned the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and stated that it likely will be expanded in the future. As the planning process progresses and the Minnesota Department of Transportation considers expanding the TAC, Inver Grove Heights would appreciate an opportunity to serve on it.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will assess potential alternatives and termini for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor. Assessment of potential impacts to community cohesion, development plans, community resources, and ecological resources will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS. Please refer to the **Issues to be Addressed in the Tier 1 EIS** section of this document for more detail.*

#### **City of Pine Island, Mayor**

City of Pine Island Comment: Because Pine Island is transected by Highway 52 and the information presented indicates the Zip rail route could potentially be constructed within a mile wide swath of the highway corridor, the community would be substantially impacted. It is essential to meet with and engage our City officials at this time in order for them to assess the potential opportunities and adverse impacts of the project. To this point, the City would like to be an active participant in the process and to be included in all future meetings of the Zip Rail Task Force.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS scheduled for completion in 2015 would identify the preferred corridor for the project. The Tier 2 EIS phase would determine actual right of way that may be needed. Counties, cities, townships and other jurisdictions with authority over portions of potential corridors will be engaged during the Tier 1 EIS in an expanded public involvement process.*

City of Pine Island Comment: Pine Island completed a thorough review and update of its Comprehensive Plan in 2010, which includes detailed plans and maps for Pine Island's future land uses, transportation systems, and infrastructure. The complete document is available on the City's website at:

<http://cc.pineislandmn.com/downloads/?nal document 101410.pdf>

Pine Island experienced marked growth (44 percent) in population from 2000 to 2008. In November of 2013, the road infrastructure to Elk Run Development, a 2,000 acre master planned development was completed laying the groundwork for a 200 acre BioBusiness Park, a

healthy living community, substantial highway commercial development and several residential developments. At full build out, the Business Park and Commercial Development of Elk Run are projected to employ 20,000 people. In addition, public/private investment in Rochester's Destination Medical Center (DMC) have created the potential to significantly add to Pine Island's future growth and development. The DMC project is projected to create 40,000 new jobs over the next 20 years. The likelihood of the City outpacing the 2005 land use projections is realistic as development of Elk Run and DMC move forward, and thus effective planning for this growth will be critical to Pine Island's future as well as the quality of life for its residents.

For these reasons, we view the construction of the Zip Rail route within the Highway 52 corridor to be a critical issue for Pine Island. In general, the City would not be in agreement with a Zip Rail route that splits the City or limits east west travel within its borders. The City would be more receptive to this project:

- If it were to include a Light Rail stop in Pine Island.
- If its location was designed to complement the City's future land use plan and transportation systems so that it will minimize adverse impacts to existing and future residential and business development.
- If the City would receive any benefit from this project.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will assess potential alternatives, stations and termini for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor. It is the intent of this project to maintain effective local access for communities and individual property owners. A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that would be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network. The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.*

### **City of Rosemount**

City of Rosemount Comments: Resolution from the City of Rosemount  
Attached please find a resolution regarding the Zip Rail Scoping Booklet and Draft Scoping Decision Document dated July 2014. This resolution was approved by the City Council during their August 4, 2014 meeting and supports the Zip Rail Investment Planning and Tier I EIS process and placement of an intermediate station within eastern Rosemount.

A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE ZIP RAIL INVESTMENT PLANNING AND TIER I  
EIS PROCESS AND PLACEMENT OF AN INTERMEDIATE STATION WITHIN  
EASTERN ROSEMOUNT.

WHEREAS, the City of Rosemount is monitoring and participating in the Zip Rail  
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC); and

WHEREAS, the Zip Rail TAC recently published a Scoping Booklet and Draft Scoping Decision Document and presented its findings at a series of open houses to gather public comment; and

WHEREAS, the Scoping document is the first step in the Tier I EIS process and identifies eight potential corridors; and

WHEREAS a midway stop in along the line is proposed in Dakota County, and

WHEREAS, each of these mile wide corridors extend through the eastern portion of Rosemount running roughly east of the Dakota County Technical College ( DCTC) and west of the Flint Hills Refinery; and

WHEREAS, the Zip Rail TAC has approached both UMore Park (University of Minnesota) and Flint Resources regarding these potential corridors and receive preliminary support; and

WHEREAS, the 2013-2014 City Council goals include the aim to increase existing community transportation and transit connections; and

WHEREAS, the City Council believes a Zip Rail stop within Rosemount could be a significant economic development tool for the community;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the city of Rosemount supports the Zip Rail Investment Planning and Tier I Environmental Impact Statement ( EIS) process; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Council of the city of Rosemount supports an intermediate transit stop within Rosemount, near DCTC.

ADOPTED this 4th day of August, 2014.

William H. Droste, Mayor

ATTEST:

Clarissa Hadler, City Clerk

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will assess potential alternatives and termini for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor. Station sites will be identified during the Tier 2 EIS.*

**City of Zumbrota, Mayor**

City of Zumbrota Comment: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed high speed passenger rail service between Rochester and the Twin Cities. On behalf of the City Council I would like to express concern of the possible detrimental impacts this project may have on the residents of Zumbrota and Goodhue County. Based on the preliminary information



provided so far as part of the draft scoping decision document dated July 2014, it appears numerous local roads and highways would be cut off as the rail line cannot have at grade crossings. This obviously would have an adverse impact on commerce, emergency services, commuting and general travel throughout the county and region.

*Response: It is the intent of this project to maintain effective local access for communities and individual property owners. A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that would be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network. The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.*

City of Zumbrota Comment: Based on this fact and other issues the City Council would like to be on record expressing serious concern about the potential adverse impact of this project on Zumbrota and Goodhue County.

*Response: All comments will be considered as the project moves forward to evaluate potential alternatives.*

#### **Belle Creek Township, Township Board**

Belle Creek Township Comment: The Belle Creek Township Board met on August 13, 2014. The agenda included discussion on the current proposed Zip Rail project that would travel through rural Goodhue County, Minnesota, traveling between the cities of Rochester and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

The proposed Zip Rail or high-speed rail is not a commuter train in that people living between the end points of this rail segment would not be able to board in between. It would not serve the residents of Belle Creek Township or Goodhue County. This proposed high-speed rail plan would severely restrict area travel and transportation of goods and hinder local agricultural operations with crossing limitations.

Crossing limitations would put the public at added risk. Increased response time of emergency services could result in increased deaths and property losses.

Tax rolls would be affected by probable use of eminent domain to acquire needed land for rail construction. Land taken out of the tax rolls = lost revenue for the township.

Future growth along the Zip Rail corridor would be affected. It is unlikely anyone would want to build a home near a high-speed rail line. It is unlikely a business would locate where there are restrictive crossings. Unrealized future growth is lost revenue.

Costs for this project are estimated in the billions. The current intersections now being planned and built would be a wasted effort and money. Local counties, townships and cities along this route would be asked to share these costs. They would “Bear the Burden, but not the Benefit.” The Belle Creek Township Board unanimously opposes this Zip Rail Plan. The Belle Creek Township Board approves the “NO-Build” Option.

*Response: The purpose of the project is to provide a reliable and safe passenger rail transportation alternative that is convenient and cost effective and will serve the forecasted population and economic growth demands in the corridor. The No-Build Alternative will be carried through the project development process along with the Build alternatives. Costs of the project will be dependent on the alignment, the equipment identified, and other factors that will further analyzed in the environmental process.*

*A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that would be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network. The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.*

### **Wasioja Township**

The Wasioja Township Board at their regular monthly meeting on August 11, 2014 adopted the following Resolution 8-11-14 opposing the Zip Rail project.

Whereas, the Zip Rail line would close all but a few main roads that would go over or under the line causing graders and snow plows to drive many extra miles to get to other end of closed roads taking extra time and cost to the Township.

Whereas, closing these roads would delay emergency vehicles (such as fire trucks, ambulances and police) from getting to emergencies endangering lives and property. Whereas, closing these roads would also cause school buses extra miles to pick up the school children at more cost.

Whereas, closing these roads and cutting through farm land would cause farmers much inconvenience and added expense to work the land and get product to market.

Whereas, there is no assurance that the Zip Rail would be self-supporting and built without taxpayer money causing further expense for all the people inconvenienced.

Therefore, Be it Resolved that Wasioja Township opposes the Zip Rail project even if it takes the Highway 52 route and supports the No Build Option.

The vote on the adoption was unanimous.

*Response: The township's resolution will be taken into account as the project moves forward to evaluate potential alternatives, including the No-Build alternative.*

*It is the intent of this project to maintain effective local access for communities and individual property owners. A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that would be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network. The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.*

### **Comments by Theme**

The following themes were used to categorize and respond to the many public comments that were received during the scoping comment period. Note that most of the individual comments addressed multiple themes, including Project Purpose and Need; Alternatives Analysis; Service Development Plan; Environmental Impacts; Public Communications; and Other Miscellaneous (Table 3).

**Table 3. Comments Received by Theme**

| <b>Theme</b>             | <b>Comments Addressing Theme</b> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Project Purpose and Need | 37                               |
| Alternatives Analysis    | 180                              |
| Service Development Plan | 153                              |
| Environmental Impacts    | 96                               |
| Public Communications    | 31                               |
| Other Miscellaneous      | 44                               |

#### **Project Purpose and Need**

A total of 37 comments were received regarding the project's purpose and need and data used to develop the need.

*Response: The purpose of the project is to provide a reliable and safe passenger rail transportation alternative that is convenient and cost effective and will serve the forecasted population and economic growth demands in the corridor. The project would reduce travel times, improve reliability, provide an efficient transportation option, and promote environmental benefits including reduced air pollutant emissions and fewer adverse impacts on surrounding habitat and water resources. The purpose and need statement was posted on the project web site on October 7, 2013 at [www.goziprail.org](http://www.goziprail.org).*

*The purpose and need statement provides more detailed information than the summary provided in the Scoping Booklet, including data indicating population and employment growth in Rochester and Southeast Minnesota and the Twin Cities.*

*The purpose and need was developed utilizing data from various sources, including, but not limited to, City of Rochester, the Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan, Minnesota State Demographic Center, Rochester Area Economic Development, Inc., US Census Bureau, USDOT Federal Railroad Administration, Minnesota State Demographic Center, and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.*

### **Alternatives Analysis – General**

A total of 2 comments were received pertaining to the screening that has been completed and the alternatives analysis that will be completed as part of the Tier 1 EIS.

*Response: The screening criteria are summarized in the Final Scoping Decision Document and will be included in the Tier 1 EIS in the 'Alternatives Considered' discussion. Two levels of corridor screening were applied to the universe of alternatives, consisting of some 1,200 possible combinations of route segments. The criteria for Level 1 screening included preliminary travel time (end to end), redundancy, and impacts to the built and natural environments. Criteria for Level 2 screening included preliminary travel time (end to end), top speed, ridership, consistency with local planning efforts, connectivity, and social, economic and environmental impacts.*

*The Tier 1 EIS will evaluate potential alternatives, including the No-Build alternative, and termini for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor and will identify the preferred corridor for the project. The rail corridor is planned to connect Rochester with existing and/or proposed transportation facilities in Minneapolis/St. Paul.*

### **Local Roadway Crossings**

A total of 30 comments were received regarding the project's potential to change, relocate or eliminate local roadways and access points.

*Response: It is the intent of this project to maintain effective local access for communities and individual property owners. A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that would be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network. The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.*

### **Mode Choice**

A total of 44 comments were received pertaining to exploring other modes of transportation for this corridor. Comments referred to highway, air, bus, and self-driving automobiles as other modes to consider.

*Response: This project will be completed in cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), which is the federal agency charged with delivery of high speed rail projects. The FRA approach to alternatives analysis considers passenger rail corridors that would provide a reliable and safe passenger rail transportation alternative that is convenient and cost effective and would serve the forecasted population and economic growth demands of the corridor. The evaluation of other modes of transportation for these corridors would be considered as potential mode choices under the No-Build Alternative.*

### **No-Build Alternative**

A total of 31 comments were received addressing the No-Build alternative.

*Response: The No-Build alternative is retained throughout the environmental review process. Each potential alternative, including the No-Build alternative, will be the base of comparison for the potential Build alternatives. If implementing the No-Build alternative would result in predictable actions by others, this impact would be part of the effects of the No-Build alternative.*

### **Property Acquisition**

A total of 27 comments related to the need for property acquisition, notification of individual property owners and questioned the process that would be utilized.

*Response: The corridors identified in the Final Scoping Decision Document will be evaluated in the Tier 1 EIS and to identify a preferred corridor. A specific alignment within that corridor would not be determined until the more detailed Tier 2 EIS and would involve municipalities, residents and other stakeholders throughout the study area. The right-of-way acquisition needs for the alignment will be determined during the Tier 2 EIS.*

*No property acquisition for right-of-way may be undertaken until the completion of all environmental documents. Any acquisition of property for right-of-way would be in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-646) and MnDOT's established process for property acquisition.*

### **Routes**

A total of 28 comments were received regarding where the route of the project will travel, including where the end points will be located.

*Response: The screening criteria used to select the proposed study corridors are summarized in the Final Scoping Decision Document and additional information will be included in the Tier 1 EIS in the 'Alternatives Considered' discussion. The Tier 1 EIS will evaluate the No-Build alternative, potential corridor Build alternatives and termini and identify the preferred corridor for*

*the project. The rail corridor is planned to connect Rochester with existing and/or proposed transportation facilities in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Specific station sites would be identified and evaluated during the Tier 2 EIS.*

### **Highway 52 Corridor**

A total of 18 comments were received suggesting the project be located within or adjacent to the Highway 52 right of way, within the median, or elevated to avoid conflicts with intersecting roadways or other access.

*Response: As a direct result of the public responses at meetings and written public comments, a new “hybrid” alternative was developed in the US 52 corridor. The alternative presented in the Draft Scoping Decision Document (DSDD) was identified as located west of the US 52 right-of-way, potentially extending two to three miles. Public comments and further discussion with MnDOT staff led to a refined hybrid corridor that would generally begin in the existing right-of-way of US 52 and extend west, but remain closer to the US 52 right-of-way than initially described in the DSDD. This alternative is called a “hybrid” because it combines the best attributes of two previously evaluated corridors.*

*The alternatives screening criteria were used to analyze this refined hybrid corridor, which is adjacent to and within the US 52 right-of-way, and approximately one-mile wide to facilitate comparison with the other corridor options. Additional information on the screening criteria used for the hybrid corridor will be included in the Tier 1 EIS, in the “Alternatives Considered” section.*

*A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that would be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network. The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.*

### **Connectivity**

A total of 16 comments were received regarding the trip a user would take to and from the proposed project termini.

*Response: The passenger rail corridor is planned to connect Rochester with existing and/or proposed transportation facilities in Minneapolis/St. Paul. More detailed information regarding connections to and from the rail corridor will be examined in the Service Development Plan, which will be prepared concurrently with the Tier 1 EIS study.*

### **Cost of Construction**

A total of 20 comments were received regarding cost of construction.

*Response: The Service Development Plan will be prepared concurrently with the Tier 1 EIS and will evaluate the capital cost of the project. The capital cost of the project is dependent on the location and characteristics of the preferred corridor and end-points, the rail alignment and configuration within the corridor, the equipment identified, and other factors that will be further analyzed in the Service Development Plan.*

### **Cost of Operations**

A total of 29 comments were received regarding cost of operations, the cost of a ticket, and whether an operating subsidy would be needed.

*Response: The Service Development Plan will be prepared concurrently with the Tier 1 EIS and will evaluate the operations and maintenance costs of the project, including fixed and variable costs. Estimates of operating costs will include expense categories including equipment, energy and fuel, track, train crew, on-board services, stations, insurance, administration and management, marketing, and operator profit. Fare-box revenue will be considered and ticket prices determined as part of the analysis.*

### **Benefit/Cost Analysis**

A total of 39 comments addressed the level of benefits that would be realized if the project is built.

*Response: The Service Development Plan will be prepared concurrently with the Tier 1 EIS and will evaluate project benefits and costs in accordance with FRA guidance for Benefit/Cost Analyses.*

### **Ridership/Fare-box Revenue**

A total of 21 comments were received regarding potential ridership and fare-box revenue.

*Response: A comprehensive travel demand model will be developed as part of the Service Development Plan using the latest socio-economic, traffic volumes (air, bus, and auto) and updated network data (e.g., gas prices) to test the likely ridership response to rail service improvements over time. The ridership and revenue estimates are sensitive to trip purpose, frequencies, travel times, fuel cost and other trip attributes. Revenue estimates for fare box will be developed as part of the Service Development Plan.*

### **Station Locations**

A total of 28 comments were received about where stations would be located and the number of, or lack thereof, stations proposed in the corridor.

*Response: This Final Scoping Decision Document identified potential station locations in the vicinity of MSP Airport, Union Depot in St. Paul, Downtown Rochester, and an intermediate station in Dakota County. Potential station locations will be evaluated in the Tier 1 EIS. Specific station sites and access analysis would be evaluated in Tier 2.*

### **Environmental Impacts/Tier 1 EIS - General**

A total of 10 comments were received pertaining to potential project impacts that should be evaluated for the project.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will compare and analyze the various corridor alternatives, including the No-Build alternative, and will identify a preferred corridor. The Tier 2 EIS will identify the alignment within the preferred corridor and provide site-specific analysis of impacts within that alignment. The environmental process will be in compliance with both Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).*

### **Community Impacts**

A total of 9 comments were received pertaining to community impacts.

*Response: The location of project corridors will be compared to community facilities and public services, areas where transportation corridors exist, and compatibility with development plans in the Tier 1 EIS. Refer to the **Issues to be Addressed in the Tier 1 EIS** section of the Final Scoping Decision Document for more detail.*

### **Economic Impacts**

A total of 18 comments were received pertaining to the project's effect on the local economy.

*Response: The Service Development Plan will be prepared concurrently with the Tier 1 EIS and will evaluate project benefits and costs in accordance with FRA guidance for Benefit/Cost Analyses.*

### **Emergency Response and Safety**

A total of 16 comments were received pertaining to emergency response and safety issues.

*Response: The location of emergency service providers and their access routes will be examined in the Tier 1 EIS. It is the intent of this project to maintain effective local access for communities and individual property owners. A transportation system impact assessment will be completed in the Tier 1 EIS to determine the number of roadway crossings that would be impacted and whether these affected crossings should be at-grade or grade-separated crossings. The assessment will document changes in access and connectivity in the local transportation network. The Tier 2 EIS will verify the impacts to the local roadway network resulting from the preferred corridor, including access modifications and grade-separated crossings, or whether tracks or existing roadways would be elevated as means to maintain local access.*

### **Farmland**

A total of 33 comments were received pertaining to the impact to farmland and agriculture land uses in the study area.



*Response: As a part of the Tier 1 EIS process, impacts to agricultural soils will be addressed by determining the amount of farmland that could potentially be converted to a different use by each alternative. Additionally, county soil surveys will be consulted in conjunction with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) data to determine the amount of prime and unique farmlands, within the converted farmland, potentially affected by each alternative in order to compare the corridors. Where appropriate GIS data sets are available, total farmland acreage by corridor will be computed. Upon identification of a preferred alternative, the Tier 2 EIS will identify the alignment within the preferred corridor and provide detailed analysis of potential impacts to farmlands including the potential impact of severed parcels on farming operations. Additionally, during the Tier 2 EIS, pursuant to the Farmland Protection Policy Act, a Farmland Conversion Impact Rating form will be completed and coordinated with the NRCS.*

### **Wildlife Crossings/Ecological**

A total of 10 comments were received pertaining to ecological impacts, including wildlife crossings of a potential corridor.

*Response: The Tier 1 EIS will identify and compare wildlife crossings and other potential ecological impacts within the various corridor alternatives. Coordination with the appropriate state and federal agencies will occur in the analysis of ecological resource impacts.*

### **Favor/Against Project**

This category records the number of respondents who have stated specifically if they are in favor of or against the project. A total of 27 comments indicated they were in favor of the project. A total of 53 comments indicated they were against the project.

*Response: All comments will be considered as the project evaluates potential corridor alternatives. All comments received during the scoping comment period will be included in the public comment database that will be published on the project website ([www.goziprail.org](http://www.goziprail.org)) and included as an appendix to the Final Scoping Decision Document.*

### **Public Communications and Staying Involved**

A total of 31 comments were made regarding the method of communications for the scoping meeting and future communications as the project moves forward.

*Response: Refer to Appendix A of the Final Scoping Decision Document for a complete summary of all public involvement activities in the scoping process.*

*Future public outreach activities will include notices on the project website, email blasts, social media postings, and notices in the EQB Monitor. In addition, the project team has contacted every county and municipality within the project study area offering to meet with their respective organizations. Counties, cities, townships and other jurisdictions with authority over portions of potential corridors will be engaged during the Tier 1 EIS process in an expanded public involvement process.*

### **Technical Advisory Committee Membership**

Three comments questioned the composition of the Technical Advisory Committee and whether it represented the entire corridor.

*Response: The purpose of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is to help guide the study and review project progress. The TAC includes representatives from MnDOT, Dakota County, Dodge County, Goodhue County, Hennepin County, Olmsted County, Ramsey County, Rice County, ROCOG, Metropolitan Council, Federal Aviation Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, Metropolitan Airports Commission, University of Minnesota, Canadian Pacific Railway, Union Pacific Railroad, UMore Park Development, LLC, Flint Hills Resources, City of Rosemount, City of Rochester, Rochester International Airport, and SE Minnesota Rail Alliance.*

### **Project Relationship to Twin Cities-Chicago High-Speed Rail**

One comment was received stating that this project is part of a larger Twin Cities to Chicago High-Speed Rail project and, as such, those segments through Wisconsin and Illinois should be considered and evaluated during this Tier 1 EIS process.

*Response: This project is not a connected action related to the Twin Cities to Chicago High-Speed Rail project. The Chicago-Milwaukee-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor Project is a wholly separate project.*

### **Other**

A total of 44 comments were received pertaining to other categories or issues not included in the themes above. These comments were generally more specific than these frequently noted themes. These “other” themes included:

- Design
- Document and comment availability
- Existing roadway conditions
- Hwy 56 Corridor plan
- Mailing list/email issues
- News article copies
- Response to FAQ's on project website
- Technology – fuel source
- Technology – magnetic levitation tracks
- Technology – transmission line
- Technology - Wi-Fi capabilities on board

*Response: Comments will be considered as the project evaluates potential corridors. All comments received during the scoping comment period will be included in the public comment database that will be published on the project website ([www.goziprail.org](http://www.goziprail.org)).*



