




Hennepin County
Regional Railroad Authority

701 Fourth Avenue South, Suite 400
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1842

612-348-9260
Fax: 612-348-1842
www.hennepin.us

DATE: December 10, 2012
TO: Federal Transit Administration, Region V
FROM: Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority
Debra Brisk, Deputy Executive Director 
SUBJECT: Southwest Transitway Draft Environmental Impact Statement
Questions and Responses for Surface Transportation Board

The following are responses to the questions submitted by the Surface Transportation Board to the Federal Transit Administration, Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA), and Metropolitan Council regarding the Southwest Transitway Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Canadian Pacific (CP) Wye Track

1. *Is it a switching or wye track?*

RESPONSE: The track is a wye track that provides a connection from the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) Bass Lake Spur to the CP MN&S Spur. As shown and labeled as Skunk Hollow on figure 2.3-2 on page 2-22 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS, the wye track, historically, has been used by the Twin Cities & Western Railroad Company (TC&W) for switching operations in order to facilitate freight movement to the Port of Savage. The wye can be used to access the MN&S route to either the north or the south of the Bass Lake Spur. Additionally, there is one shipper on the wye that occasionally receives shipments by rail.

2. *Is the wye or switching track already constructed?*

RESPONSE: The wye is constructed. See Figures 2.3-1 and 2.3-2 in the Southwest Transitway DEIS, where the wye is identified as Skunk Hollow. The attached Figure 2 provides a closer view of the location of the existing wye.

3. *Where on the CP line would/is the wye track located?*

RESPONSE: See Figures 2.3-1 and 2.3-2 in the Southwest Transitway DEIS. The attached Figure 2 also provides a closer view of the location of the existing wye.

4. *Is there a map that shows its location or proposed location?*

RESPONSE: See Figures 2.3-1 and 2.3-2 in the Southwest Transitway DEIS. The attached Figure 2 also provides a closer view of the location of the existing wye.

5. *How is the wye or switching track part of the proposed Southwest Transitway project? What is its purpose?*

RESPONSE: The FTA granted approval for the Southwest Light Rail Transit (SWLRT) Project entry into Preliminary Engineering (PE) in a letter dated September 2, 2011. Per this letter, FTA indicated the Project needs to "Analyze the impacts of relocating the Twin Cities & Western freight line, which currently operates on a segment of the planned Southwest LRT route, in the project's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Because the freight relocation is necessary for MC {Metropolitan Council} to be able to implement the Southwest LRT project as planned, the cost and scope of the freight line relocation must be included in the Southwest LRT project scope and budget, regardless of the funding sources that may be identified to pay for the work. This must be completed prior to seeking entry into Final Design." Page 2-9 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS discusses the letter and requirement to include the freight rail relocation.

National Lead/Golden Auto Site

Greater detail is required for the connection over the National Lead/Golden Auto Site:

6. *Is this connection part of the MN&S line already? If not, is it a new connection?*

RESPONSE: The direct connection proposed between the Bass Lake Spur and the MN&S Spur does not currently exist. The current connection is the wye track. See section 1.3.2.3 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS for a description of the connections.

7. *Provide a more specific description of the location of the connection?*

RESPONSE: As seen in the attached Figure 2, the connection will be located in the northwest quadrant where the MN&S Spur crosses over the Bass Lake Spur on a bridge.

8. *Are the tracks in existence?*

RESPONSE: The connection currently in place is the wye track.

9. *Are the tracks being utilized?*

RESPONSE: The CP-owned Bass Lake Spur and CP-owned MN&S Spur tracks are currently in use by TC&W and CP, respectively. The wye has historically been used by TC&W to access the Port of Savage.

10. *Are the tracks to be upgraded?*

RESPONSE: Under the relocation alternative outlined in the Southwest Transitway DEIS, the CP-owned Bass Lake and MN&S Spurs are proposed to be upgraded to accommodate future freight train operations of CP and TC&W, including but not limited to, 136-pound continuously welded rail. See Section 2.3.3.1 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS for further description of freight rail as part of build alternatives LRT 1A, LRT 3A, LRT 3C-1, and LRT 3C-2.

11. *It looks like there are 2 trains per week that move over the MN&S line -- but does any traffic travel over the connection at this point?*

RESPONSE: There currently is no direct connection between the CP-owned Bass Lake and MN&S Spurs. The only connection is the wye track, which has historically been used by the TC&W to access the Port of Savage. See Figures 2.3-1 and 2.3-2 in the Southwest Transitway DEIS. The attached Figure 2 provides a closer view of the location of the current configuration and proposed connection for LRT 1A, LRT 3A, LRT 3C-1, and LRT 3C-2.

FRR Route

12. *Are there any segments of the FRR that currently do not have train traffic (but would have train traffic if the reroute occurs)?*

RESPONSE: All segments discussed in the Southwest Transitway DEIS, and included as part of the relocation alternative, have existing train traffic. See section 2.3.1.3 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS for a summary of current freight rail operations in the study area. See Table 2.3-2 in the Southwest Transitway DEIS for an estimate from the MN&S Freight Rail Study of existing and projected future freight trains on the MN&S Spur.

13. *Please provide a map with a close-up view of the MN&S line (detailed enough to show street names, the Golden Auto Site, and the existing/proposed connection).*

RESPONSE: See Figure 2.3-1 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS. The attached Figures 1-3 provide a closer view of the location of the MN&S Spur, including the requested information.

14. *Please provide a map of the existing freight lines/routes (with names to indicate which rail line is which), and a more detailed map that shows the rail lines that freight would be rerouted over. [The map should show street names and any switching track or connection(s) needed on the MN&S and/or Wayzata lines in order to implement the reroute of freight traffic.]*

RESPONSE: See Figure 2.3-1 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS. The attached Figure 1 provides a closer view of the location of the MN&S Spur and Wayzata Subdivision, including the requested information.

15. *What planned rail line abandonment is part of this proposed project?*

RESPONSE: It is our understanding that, if freight rail is relocated, the HCRRA will need to abandon the Kenilworth Corridor tracks and CP will need to abandon a portion of their trackage along the Bass Lake Spur. Specific actions and requirements will be developed during the Preliminary Engineering (PE) process, with STB consultation and concurrence.

16. *Page 2-46 states: "The Build Alternatives would primarily use HCRRA owned ROW, which is abandoned freight rail property acquired to preserve it for a future transportation use." What is the history of this abandonment? Was the ROW officially abandoned and is there a Board decision regarding this abandonment?*

RESPONSE: Refer to response to question number 15. In addition, it is our understanding that CP and TC&W will need to abandon their overhead bridge trackage rights in the same area.

On December 6, 1995, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) permitted the Chicago and Northwestern Transportation Company (CNW) to abandon the 3.65-mile track and discontinue service under Docket Number AB-1 (Sub Number 252X). Under the same decision, the ICC exempted HCRRA from obligations under Subtitle IV of United States Code 49 under Finance Docket Number 32816 as the HCRRA acquired the track from CNW.

See Appendix J of the Southwest Transitway DEIS for specific railroad agreements, and Appendix H for further background on rail corridor ownership.

17. *Detail required on DEIS: "abandoned Iron Triangle alignment, between West 27th Street and the connection with the BNSF Wayzata Subdivision." (Page 4-136). Are there plans to use this abandoned ROW for freight rail service or for the light rail service?*

RESPONSE: This alignment is planned for freight rail service only. The track, which existed as a freight rail connection historically, provides a connection from the CP MNS Spur to the BNSF Wayzata Subdivision for the relocation alternative.

18. *Is there any additional abandoned or existing ROW that would be used for the project?*

RESPONSE: The Southwest Transitway DEIS, and information contained within, is based on conceptual engineering drawings. As such, this will be further investigated as part of the PE process and development of 30% Plans and Specifications.

19. *Please indicate whether all the necessary ROW for the proposed project is already abandoned? (If so, the Board needs descriptions that include the date that the line was abandoned, the name of the applicant who sought abandonment authority from the Board, and a description of the rail line that was abandoned, including milepost numbers as well as the length of the segment that was abandoned).*

RESPONSE: All Right-of-Way (ROW) needed for this project has not gone through the abandonment process. During PE, and with STB consultation and concurrence, the need for future freight rail ROW abandonment will be reviewed and addressed.

Freight Movement Area

20. *If freight traffic is rerouted over the MN&S line, would TC&W be able to serve new markets or new territory?*

RESPONSE: It is our understanding that there will not be any new markets or territory served because of the reroute. TC&W currently has trackage rights on the CP-owned Bass Lake Spur and the MN&S Spur. By using the reroute, the TC&W would exercise existing rights over the MN&S line.

21. *Are there any potential customers located along the re-route that would be serviced under the new alignment, who are currently not being serviced?*

RESPONSE: At this time, we are not aware of any potential customers along the reroute that could be serviced under this new alignment. The Metropolitan Council, as the local project sponsor for the Southwest LRT project, will continue to coordinate with CP and TCW through PE.

22. *If freight traffic is rerouted from CP's Bass Lake and HCRRA's lines to the MN&S and Wayzata lines, it looks like six trains would be the highest number of trains per week that would be rerouted. Is that number correct?*

RESPONSE: Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1.3 and Table 2.3-2 of the Southwest Transitway DEIS uses information generated by the MN&S Freight Rail report to estimate the existing and future freight rail traffic. This information was developed with input from the freight rail companies.

23. *Is freight traffic expected to increase in the next 10 years?*

RESPONSE: Railroads typically do not share this information since operations are based on changes in the marketplace and other variables (i.e., world and national economy, new customers, new agreements between carriers, new commodity movements, etc.). The project team cannot respond to this question, as increases in freight rail service or service to new markets along routes are established by freight rail companies in conjunction with STB approval. The project team intends to work with the freight rail companies to transition the rerouting of freight from the Kennilworth corridor to the MN&S line.

Copy: Metropolitan Council (Mark Furhmann, Chris Weyer, Nani Jacobson)
HCRRA (Katie Walker, Howard Orenstein)