



# NORTHSTAR NEWS



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## Minutes for the January 19th Membership Meeting of the Northstar Chapter NRHS

There was no formal business meeting during the January membership meeting of the Northstar Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society, so that we could devote more of the evening to the program. Therefore, there are no meeting minutes for this month's issue of Northstar News.

David Norman,  
Secretary Northstar Chapter NRHS

## DM & E Rail Project Gets Final Approval From Feds

*Byline: Robert  
Franklin; Staff Writer*

The nation's largest railroad construction project since the Civil War era, a \$1.5 billion transformation of the Dakota, Minnesota &

Eastern Railroad into a major coal hauler, won federal approval Wednesday.

The plan, which appears certain to be challenged in court, includes rebuilding 600 miles of the DM&E from Winona, Minn., to western South Dakota and extending the line for 262 miles into Wyoming's Powder River Basin coal fields.

The federal government's Surface Transportation Board declined to approve construction of a controversial bypass sought by the city of Rochester but opposed by the railroad. It left open the possibility of a bypass around Mankato if the DM...E cannot negotiate through town building rights on right-of-way owned by the Union Pacific Railroad. The

upgrade means that instead of three trains a day traveling at 10 miles an hour over rickety tracks, the DM&E envisions eight to 37 trains traveling at up to 45 miles an hour on a safer, smoother and quieter railway.

However, the board, which granted the final

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approval, said increased train traffic and new construction through “generally pristine rural areas would have significant environmental consequences” on roads, grade-crossing safety, noise, air quality, water resources, wetlands and aesthetics.

The board attached 147 conditions to its approval, but admitted that not all impacts can be fully mitigated.

Nevertheless, it said, the effects are not enough to deny development of a viable, safe, competitive railroad offering a reliable coal source to Midwestern utilities in a period of increased energy demand.

The board made no provision to mitigate impacts in Winona, where DM&E traffic would continue on the Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks, which DM&E doesn't own.

DM&E President Kevin Schieffer said the board's decision, “long awaited, endlessly debated and [now] celebrated,” means more than coal hauling.

Through a new connection at Owatonna, Minn., it will open additional markets in Chicago and elsewhere for grain and other products, he said, and will result in more manufacturers locating along the line. The project will produce 5,000 construction jobs and 2,000 to 3,000 permanent jobs, Schieffer said.

Will seek financing

Asked if the railroad, mostly owned by institutional investors, is for sale, Schieffer said it will seek a partnership with other companies to finance the improvement project.

In announcing its decision, the Transportation Board rejected as unnecessary pleas by Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, the Mayo Clinic and Minnesota Sens. Paul Wellstone and Mark Dayton to delay its decision and do more study.

Rochester has adamantly opposed DM&E running coal-train traffic through the city, and City Attorney Terry Adkins said Wednesday that the city would consider its legal options and talk with the Mayo Clinic. Others, including ranchers and Indian tribes on the western end of the line are believed to be considering legal action, he said.

“I'm convinced it will end up in court,” Adkins said.

Donley Darnell, a Newcastle, Wyo., rancher who is affiliated with project opponent Mid-States Coalition for Progress, said, “This is such a dumb idea that we don't see that it will ever be built.”

The project faces financing and environmental questions, including crossing unstable rock formations, he said.

Schieffer said that, if project opponents sue, the DM&E may contest some of the



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mitigation conditions the board has ordered along the existing line.

## Preserving eagle nests

The conditions range from construction of new bridges at intersections (two in Rochester) to grade-crossing improvements and, along the new line, building underpasses for big game and preserving bald-eagle nests.

The Surface Transportation Board also retained authority to resolve environmental questions for two years.

Wednesday's decision was foreshadowed by two earlier actions by the board. Three years ago it ruled that the project would serve the public interest on transportation and financial issues and that, without it, the DM&E probably "would cease to exist as a viable railroad."

Then, last November, the board's environmental-impact statement endorsed the project \_ with 147 conditions that would cost \$140 million.

The plan has been so controversial that an unprecedented 13,000 comments were sent to the Surface Transportation Board during preparation of preliminary and final environmental-impact statements, and more than 500 people spoke at a dozen public meetings.

The railroad earlier reached agreements with 51 of 56 cities along the line.

In Rochester, the city has not opposed the DM&E project as a whole, just running the line near downtown, the Mayo Clinic, residential areas and a federal prison facility.

Opponents of the in-town line included former Vice President Walter Mondale, who used to serve on the clinic's governing board. The in-city line would be "about the worst single self-inflicted, damaging wound that I've seen in a long time in Minnesota," Mondale said last year, calling it "an awful, dangerous, damaging thing to do."

But a proposed 34-mile bypass also drew criticism that such a plan would encounter its own set of geographic problems \_ hills, wetlands, dips, power lines and areas of geology that are sensitive to pollution. And, rural residents said, the bypass might close roads.

Kathy King, president of Citizens Against Rochester's Bypass, said Wednesday that "we are happy with the [board's] decision. The Transportation Board consists of Chairman Linda Morgan, a Maryland Democrat and former counsel to the Senate Commerce Committee, and Vice Chairman Wayne Burkes, a former Republican Mississippi legislator and transportation commissioner. There is one vacancy.



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The DM&E was formed in 1986 from lines that other railroads wanted to abandon. It includes tracks that the Chicago & North Western railroad built across southern Minnesota in the 1870s.

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Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)

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## United Rail Passenger Alliance Not Happy with Amtrak Ultimatum

*By. Bruce Richardson*

February 02, 2002

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA (February 1, 2002) - United Rail Passenger Alliance today denounced as irresponsible and extortionate Amtrak's threat to eliminate America's long distance passenger trains.

In a news release issued today, Amtrak stated that it would file contingency discontinuance notices for the entire national long distance passenger train system on March 29, 2002, so the notices could go into effect on October 1, 2002, the first day of the new Amtrak fiscal year, if Congress does not vote Amtrak the federal funding it demands.

"This has become the great train robbery of 2002," said Bruce Richardson, President of United Rail Passenger Alliance. "Jesse James had the courtesy to use a mask and a gun before he looted trains. George Warrington and the Amtrak board are trying to do the same thing,

looting the United States Treasury at an emotional gunpoint by threatening to shut down the national system if they don't get the subsidy they demand for the never-ending capital needs of the Northeast Corridor.

"URPA has published a business strategy that would preserve service in the NEC at a lower capital cost than Amtrak's plan, and actually grow service in the national system, with no additional federal subsidies.

"Amtrak's actions prove the point that the White House needs to move immediately in the best interest of the country and use its legal authority to remove and replace the entire Amtrak board of directors and Amtrak senior management, and find replacements that are willing to realistically assess the needs of passenger rail transportation in our country on a reasonable budget."

Andrew Selden, URPA Vice President for Law and Policy, disagrees with Amtrak's assessment of the future. "Amtrak says the United States has one option: their astronomically expensive and unrealistic plan, or nothing. That is not the case. URPA's long standing plan, which was part of the Amtrak Reform Council deliberations and restructuring plan, says that with existing levels of funding, the long distance system can be comfortably operated now, and gradually expanded in the foreseeable future.

"Amtrak's failed business plan doesn't recognize other options, it only focuses on continuing what has been proven time and time



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again as an expensive failure. Amtrak's own strategies produced the crisis they are in. Why in the world would we want to throw billions more of good money after bad?"

"Amtrak is throwing a corporate temper tantrum in front of Congress and the Bush administration," said Richardson. "Its stance is arrogant, politically naive, and just plain silly. On Monday (February 4, 2002), the White House is delivering to Congress a budget proposal for next year that will have an \$85 billion deficit. Now, Amtrak wants more money, which will raise that deficit. Amtrak's timing and political sensitivity is terrible.

"When you add the overt threat of discontinuing the entire national system, including every train outside of the Northeast Corridor, then Amtrak will leave the Bush administration and Congress with no choice, but to find new leadership for Amtrak. Clearly, the present leadership is living in a dream world.

"To everyone's horror, we have seen in the past few weeks the wreckage a corporate hierarchy out of control did to Enron. Now, we are seeing the same thing at Amtrak. George Warrington and the Amtrak board are out of control, and must be stopped before Amtrak becomes even more of a corporate basket case than it already is. America cannot afford another Enron style failure where the taxpayers and those who depend on Amtrak for their intercity transportation are left holding the bag."

For more information, contact Bruce Richardson in Jacksonville, Florida at 904-636-6760, or

Andrew Selden in Minneapolis at 612-334-8485 during normal business hours.

Article appears courtesy of All-Aboard News Group and Dan Meyer

## Editor's Notes

*By Lauren Maiden*

Anyone is welcome to submit articles for the Northstar News. If you wish to submit an article please, PLEASE follow the guidelines below as they help keep down the cost of publication.

Thanks,  
Lauren Maiden-Editor

Guidelines for Submission in the  
**Northstar News**

1. Articles must be postmarked/time-stamped by the **first of the month**, while it may not be used in that exact month, rest assured your article will be used.
2. Articles need to be under 2000 words- any more and it will come back for editing.
3. You can submit articles, etc to:

**Lauren Maiden**  
**UWRF Crabtree 209**  
**850 E Cascade Ave**  
**River Falls, WI 54022**

**LAUREN.K.MAIDEN@UWRF.EDU**

4. **If you would like to make comments, suggestions about what you would like to see in the newsletter, please contact either the Editor, or Dan Meyer.**



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*Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the Northstar News are not necessarily the opinions of the NRHS or the Northstar Chapter.*



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**The February Northstar Chapter, NRHS Meeting is  
Saturday, February 16 @ 7:00 PM  
@ the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center.**

Directions: Take Snelling Ave to Energy Park Drive. Exit and turn right at the bottom of the ramp. Watch for the entrance gate to the Firefighters Training Center. (Look for the cement building that looks scorched.) If you go past Midway Stadium you have gone too far. (Map courtesy of Mapquest.com)

*Meetings are usually the third Saturday of the month  
in the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center.*

*NEXT MEETING: March 16 @ the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center-  
Program TBA in the March Northstar News*



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## *Extra Extra!!*

DM & E has extra copies of their  
2002 available for sale this year.  
Copies are available by sending a  
check for \$8 (postpaid) payable to the  
DM & E and send to them at:



DM & E Railroad  
337 22nd Avenue  
Brookings, SD 57006

Lauren Maiden will be walking for the **AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY** on March 8-9, 2002 from 6pm to 10am in River Falls HS- River Falls, WI.

Because cancer has touched so many lives, my own personally, I am looking for sponsors to make tax-deductible donation to help with all aspects of Cancer research, treatment, counseling, etc. If you would like to make a donation to the cause please make the check payable to: **American Cancer Society** and send to:

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850 E. Cascade Ave,  
River Falls, WI, 54022-- w/ memo of: Relay 4 Life by MARCH 1ST

