

# RAMSEY COUNTY REGIONAL RAILROAD AUTHORITY

May 17, 2011

The Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority met with the following members present: Bennett, Carter, Ortega, Parker, Rettman, McDonough – 6. Absent: Reinhardt – 1. Also present was Julie Kleinschmidt, County Manager and Phil Carruthers, Director of Civil Division, Ramsey County Attorney's Office.

Chair McDonough called the meeting to order at 10:10 AM.

## AGENDA

Commissioner Bennett moved approval of the Agenda of the May 17, 2011 Board Meeting, seconded by Commissioner Carter. Roll Call: Ayes – Carter, Ortega, Parker, Rettman, Bennett, McDonough – 6. Nays – 0.

## MINUTES

Commissioner Cater moved approval of the Minutes of the April 5, 2011 Board Meeting, seconded by Commissioner Parker. Roll Call: Ayes – Carter, Ortega, Parker, Rettman, Bennett, McDonough – 6. Nays – 0.

### 1. Rochester Zip Rail Project Update

[The Zip Rail presentation is on file with the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority office and is viewable on the Ramsey County website at <http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/meetings/>]

Chair McDonough said Zip Rail line/Rochester Corridor is the Rochester to Minneapolis/St. Paul rail connection, and the Zip Rail group consists of people and businesses from the City of Rochester, Olmsted County, and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. He introduced the presenter, Olmsted County Commissioner Ken Brown.

Ken Brown, Olmsted County Commissioner, introduced his project partners: Chuck Michael, project Engineering Consultant; Rochester Mayor Ardell Brede; Tim Geisler, Mayo Clinic spokesperson; Phil Wheeler, Olmsted County Planning Director.

Mr. Brown gave some background information. He said the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority (RRA) was formed in January 2009. He said Senator Amy Klobuchar submitted a freight study proposal on behalf of the Olmsted County RRA, which secured a \$487,000 federal appropriation in 2010. Olmsted County is also a principal member of the Southeast Minnesota Rail Alliance, which was established in September 2008 in partnership with the City of Rochester, Mayo Clinic and Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Brown said their current priority is high speed rail link between Rochester and the Twin Cities. The hope is for a rail line of 150 mph to 220 mph to be in place between 2020 and 2025. High speed rail would improve the existing connection between Rochester and the Twin Cities for growth, jobs and opportunities. There are 110,000 jobs in Olmsted County and the Mayo Clinic is the state's largest private employer with 32,000 employees and is surrounded by a metro area of an estimated 148,000 people. Other community assets include the University of Minnesota Rochester and IBM. Transportation options are very important for Rochester. He said the Zip Rail project is consistent with the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT) Statewide Rail Plan, as the project has been identified as a "Priority 1" project in the Plan. The project is also positioned to advance into additional analysis now that the initial feasibility has been determined and with the recommendation of \$2 million for the Rochester Corridor by Mn/DOT's Intercity Passenger Rail Forum.

Mr. Brown said there is a high return on investment with this project. Once the Zip Rail line/Rochester Corridor is built, they believe it could sustain itself on fare box revenue without public subsidy and generate profit for the partners involved. The cost for this project will likely exceed \$1 billion. They are pursuing existing state funding for additional study of potential routes and preliminary engineering, and they are

building a base of support along the corridor. Since the unveiling of the Zip Rail brand in January 2011, there has been significant outreach to the community. The group has engaged Hennepin, Ramsey and Dakota Counties, as well as the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB), the Metropolitan Council and the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce. The hope is gain input and recommendations from prospective partners, to gain their commitment to the vision and planning efforts, and to continue to increase support of the Zip Rail line.

Commissioner Parker said supporting this makes sense for Ramsey County. She added that if we are successful in getting HSR from Chicago to the Depot, this would likely include many travelers going to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

Mr. Brown said the ridership numbers are impressive; it is a big deal if we can get 20% of the people off the roads and on trains to free up some of the congestion and to allow people to travel to their destinations 20 to 30 minutes faster.

Commissioner Rettman commented that the support for this project should go both ways.

Mr. Brown agreed and appreciated the comment. He said the Zip Rail group is supportive of Ramsey County in their transit/rail efforts as well. The important thing is to see the big picture and work together.

Commissioner Ortega commented that at this point we need to keep transit as the common agenda. He said Zip Rail has a partner in Ramsey County, and he believes in the end we will succeed because the demographics and economics will dictate it.

Commissioner Bennett asked how much of the track would have to be new tracks and what speed they are aiming for.

Mr. Brown said this is a greenfield route; it would all be new. He said from US DOT's perspective this is very attractive; if you want to prove HSR works you need a new Greenfield, grade separated route. He said the speed goal they are pushing for is 150 mph, but ultimately 220 mph.

Mayor Ardell Brede commented that the rail connection between Rochester and Minneapolis/St. Paul is extremely important. It will take a unified effort to get it done, but they are looking forward to it.

Tim Geisler, Mayo Clinic, commented that since the publishing of Mn/DOT's statewide rail plan and the state's priorities, the groups in the state have come together to work on promoting every agenda in a way that the statewide rail plan can be successful. It is not just one corridor but rather all of the corridors working together that will make the state successful.

Chuck Michael, consultant for the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority, commented that congress wants to see a true high speed project that is able to stand on its own economically and can take advantage of the private sector and the private capital. He said their rail project is one of the few left in the country as a greenfield project with an ultimate speed of 220 mph that is structured as a public/private partnership, and they appreciate Ramsey County's support.

Chair McDonough commented that the Zip Rail line is a unique project that will help Minnesota to be competitive and attract federal funds in an area where there are not a lot of opportunities in the Country. He thanked the group for their leadership in moving this project forward and said Ramsey County looks forward to working with them.

#### CORRIDOR UPDATES

No updates were reported.

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair McDonough declared the meeting adjourned at 10:45 AM.