



Rochester, Minnesota to Twin Cities, Minnesota Passenger Rail Corridor Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement

A Notice to Rescind a Notice of Intent (NOI) to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was sent for public inspection on August 19, 2016, and published in the Federal Register on August 22, 2016. The Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority decided to suspend the voluntary EIS due to public funding constraints and private-sector actions to undertake a similar project. Therefore, the Federal Railroad Administration issued the Notice rescinding its NOI to prepare a Tier 1 EIS for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan.

**Below is archived web content regarding this project.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), and the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority (OCRRA) have initiated the environmental review process for the Rochester-Twin Cities Passenger Rail Corridor (Zip Rail). Federal funding will be pursued for this project from the 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). As the local public agency sponsoring the project, MnDOT, as the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU), and OCRRA must also comply with the requirements of the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

This project is anticipated as Tier 1 of a two-tier environmental review process. In the Tier 1 EIS, the technical analysis is less detailed and considers impacts to the corridor as a whole and evaluation of impacts at a qualitative level.

A Tier 1 EIS addresses questions related to the type of service being proposed, including cities and stations served, route alternatives, service levels, type of operations, ridership projections and major infrastructure components. Environmental analysis is completed at a higher level, but detailed site information is conducted at the Tier 2 environmental level, when the alignment and related service information has been determined and more specific project boundaries can be developed to determine effects.

What is Zip Rail?

The Rochester - Twin Cities Rail Corridor, or Zip Rail, is an approximately 100-mile corridor located between Rochester and the Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Area (Twin Cities). The corridor includes Olmsted, Dodge, Goodhue, Rice, Dakota, Ramsey and Hennepin counties. ([map](#))

The rail corridor is planned to connect Rochester with existing and/or proposed transportation facilities in Minneapolis/St. Paul and is consistent with an eventual high speed passenger rail regional connection between the Twin Cities and Chicago.



Zip Rail offers a different type of service than commuter rail or existing rail service:

- True high speed rail - speeds of up to 150-220 mph
- Dedicated track - no slow downs due to freight rail competition
- Time and cost competitive with air and vehicle travel
- Potential for future connections to other cities and states

As a true high-speed passenger rail service, Zip Rail offers the potential of reduced public financial support once initial capital costs are covered:

- Faster speeds generate higher ridership, which equals a higher return on investment
- Speeds and service times maximize ridership potential (i.e. full trains) which generates higher ticket/operating revenues

In addition, the Zip Rail program is pursuing the project as a Public-Private Partnership:

- Both public and private sectors will participate in funding for capital costs
- More positive operating margin makes project more attractive to private investors
- Private partner responsible and held accountable for on-time operations, maintenance and growing ridership
- Limits government financial risk and decreases government subsidies to the project

Why Zip Rail?

The purpose of the project is to study potential reliable and safe passenger rail transportation alternatives that would meet forecasted population and economic growth 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 safety, convenience and travel time
- Complement the plans of the Midwest

Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) and Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan.

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

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



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

Moving Forward

[*Minnesota Scoping Document*](#)

[*Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement*](#)

Due to anticipated federal funding for the Zip Rail project, and the fact that the project may have significant environmental impacts, the FRA is required to prepare an EIS under NEPA. MnDOT and OCRRA will also conduct this review in compliance with the MEPA and Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410.

The Tier 1 EIS process occurs in three stages – Scoping, Draft Tier 1 EIS and Final Tier 1 EIS – and culminates in a federal Record of Decision under NEPA and a state Determination of Adequacy under MEPA.

Each of the three stages includes publication of a document for public comment and narrows the number of alternatives, with the Final Tier 1 EIS identifying one or more Preferred Alternatives for the project. This Tier 1 process will be completed in 2015.

Stay Involved

Stakeholders can be involved in the study process by attending public meetings, signing up to receive project updates and by visiting the project's Facebook (facebook.com/ziprail) and Twitter (@ziprail) pages. To sign up for project updates, email the project at info@goziprail.org or visit the project website at www.goziprail.org. Comments on the project can be submitted via email, or on the project website.