



Office of the Chairman

Surface Transportation Board
Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

February 9, 2001

Dear Concerned Citizens of Minnesota:

I have received many letters from residents across the State of Minnesota, expressing concern about the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad's (DM&E) Powder River Basin Expansion Proposal, which is docketed at the Surface Transportation Board (Board) as Finance Docket No. 33407. I have written to many of you, responding to the scores of letters you have written to me setting forth your individual thoughts regarding this proceeding. Recently, I have received over 100 form letters, all detailing potential environmental impacts to the City of Rochester should the DM&E proposal be approved. I am responding to each of these letters individually. However, because of the number of letters that I have received, I would also like to make my response publicly accessible. Therefore, I am furnishing copies of my response to the Mayor's office, the City Administrator's office, the Chamber of Commerce, the Rochester Public Library, and the offices of the Rochester Post Bulletin. My letter also will be posted on the Board's website (www.stb.dot.gov).

First of all, let me thank each of you who has written me for your letter and for your interest and participation in the Board's consideration of DM&E's proposal. The DM&E proceeding has been an unusual one, due to the size and complexity of the project, as well as the unprecedented participation by the public. DM&E's proposal is the largest rail construction case considered by the Board – encompassing approximately 280 miles of new rail construction and nearly 600 miles of rail line rehabilitation in three states and involving numerous alternatives, bypasses, and proposed rail yards.

In your letters, you express your concern about potential increases in train traffic through the City of Rochester associated with DM&E's proposal, and state that DM&E's current safety record is poor. You cite a number of other potential environmental impacts to Rochester and the Mayo Clinic, including possible health risks from exposure to coal, increased noise, odor, visual impacts, effects on transportation and roads in the Rochester community, possible harm to businesses in Rochester resulting from traffic delays, and the overall impact on the Mayo Clinic. I would like to explain the next steps in the environmental review process and how your comments will be considered and made part of that process.

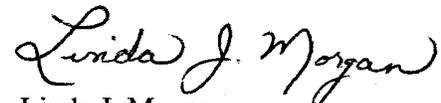
On September 27, 2000, the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) issued the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) in this proceeding for public review and comment. Comments on the Draft EIS must be postmarked by March 6, 2001. After the close of the public comment period, SEA, working with five cooperating agencies, will consider all public and agency comments on the Draft EIS in preparing a Final EIS. The Final EIS will

respond to comments received on the Draft EIS, and will also include SEA's final conclusions on potential significant impacts and recommended mitigation. The Board and the cooperating agencies will then consider the entire environmental record developed in this case – including public and agency comments, the Draft EIS, and the Final EIS – before issuing any final decision on the proposed project.

Throughout the Board's consideration of the DM&E proposal, we have worked to ensure that all interested parties and members of the general public like yourselves have been given every opportunity to participate in the process. At the same time, efforts have been made to move the process forward as expeditiously as possible. Please be assured that we will bring this proceeding to its conclusion as quickly as possible, while preserving as we must the right of everyone to be heard.

I appreciate hearing your views. I will place a copy of this response along with the Rochester form letter (with a notation that over 100 copies were received) in the general public docket for this proceeding. I also will have all of the letters that we have received made a part of the environmental record for this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be helpful in the future.

Sincerely,


Linda J. Morgan