



Feb. 15, 2023

Chair Hornstein and Members of the Transportation Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing regarding HF 246 and the proposed repeal of the prohibition of further study of the Dan Patch Commuter Line by the Met Council, MnDOT and regional rail authorities. The issue was discussed during the Dakota County General Government and Policy Committee on Feb. 7, 2023 and there was unanimous agreement to oppose the Dan Patch portion of the bill. Formal action will be before the Board of Commissioners on Feb. 28, 2023.

The Dan Patch line currently operates freight trains from Northfield to the Airlake Industrial Park. However, trains have not traveled through Lakeville and Burnsville for at least 30 years. The track is in poor condition and transverses many neighborhoods and environmentally sensitive areas that would make upgrades to meet a passenger rail safety standard nearly impossible and prohibitively expensive.

The Dakota County Regional Rail Authority completed a study of the Dan Patch Corridor to examine the feasibility of commuter rail within the corridor on Dec. 28, 2001 (Dan Patch Corridor Commuter Rail Feasibility Study). The study identified that "corridor communities have serious concerns regarding the livability of neighborhoods and recreational facilities adjacent to the rail line, should passenger service be implemented." More than 2,300 residents attended 24 meetings on the corridor. Of the 600 comments received, 70 percent were opposed to the project.

The study found that the line would require a complete rebuild for an estimated \$481 million (in 2010 dollars) in construction and environmental contingency. Applying the Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator to estimate those 2010 dollars in Dec. 2022 (the latest data available) leads to an overall project budget of over \$845 million. In short, the use of the Dan Patch Corridor for commuter rail is not feasible and could undermine the viability of the Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit line and other investments in transit.

While the feasibility study determined that the corridor was not right for commuter rail, it is ideally suited to be a greenway corridor. Dakota County's Lake Marion Greenway Master Plan (Aug. 20, 2013) specifically states "(t)he corridor ... is rich in cultural history that could be integrated into interpretive elements along the corridor. If the ... line becomes available it should be acquired and converted to include a greenway trail, and may become the regional greenway corridor."

County Board of Commissioners

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In addition, the 2023 Dakota County Legislative Platform (Jan. 24, 2023) supports alternative uses for the Dan Patch corridor:

- Dakota County supports state and local acquisition of rail corridors that are currently under- or un-utilized to improve nonmotorized transportation.

We would appreciate your support in focusing efforts related to this corridor on nonmotorized uses rather than a future commuter rail.

Thank you,



Liz Workman, Chair
Dakota County Board of Commissioners

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