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## PROPOSED RAIL CONNECTION IN CRYSTAL

### 1. The Connection and Local Impacts

- a. Crystal city staff learned from affected property owners in mid-November that the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) and Canadian Pacific (CP) railroads are proposing to construct a connector track in the southwest quadrant of their “diamond” crossing in Crystal. This aerial image shows the general vicinity of the proposed connection.



- b. At a February 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, BNSF representatives provided Crystal staff with the engineered drawing below that depicts the alignment of the connection, and they confirmed that the design speed of the curve is 25 mph. This is the first illustration of any kind received by the city despite the City’s repeated requests of both BNSF and MnDOT Rail.



- c. BNSF representatives confirmed that the connection will bring a significant increase in the frequency of heavy freight trains on the BNSF track in Crystal and extending through Robbinsdale, Golden Valley and Minneapolis.
- d. BNSF representatives stated that the pending agreement with CP does not include restrictions on the type of freight to be moved on the BNSF track and that they are aware that Bakken oil is among the cargo currently being shipped on the CP.
- e. BNSF acknowledged that currently only 2-3 trains make round trips/week on the BNSF and they are much shorter than those running on the CP. Dozens of heavy freight trains run on the CP each day; and according to BNSF, those trains can be between 1-2 miles in length.
- f. Currently, east-west running CP trains block 2 intersections in Crystal: Douglas Drive and West Broadway. When this occurs emergency responders can rely upon Corvallis Avenue to provide access to Bottineau Blvd and the northern one-third of the city, as seen below.



- g. With the proposed rail connection a freight train of only 4,000 feet (¾ mile) in length diverted from the CP to the BNSF would simultaneously close all four of the at-grade crossings in Crystal (Douglas Drive, West Broadway, Corvallis Avenue and again at West Broadway), thereby eliminating access to Bottineau Blvd and the northern one-third of the city of Crystal.

- h. A mile-long train diverted to the BNSF would close the 45½ Avenue crossing in Robbinsdale simultaneously with Crystal's four crossings. As a result, all crossings between Winnetka Avenue in New Hope and Highway 100 in Robbinsdale, a track distance of 2¼ miles through a fully developed urban area, would be closed by a single mile-long train.
- i. The simultaneous closing of these grade crossings will significantly impede access for residents and businesses, and most importantly, extend emergency vehicle response times on calls to the northern one-third of the city, including Crystal's major commercial and business activity center. First responders heading north to a call would be forced to turn around and backtrack to either Winnetka Avenue in New Hope or Highway 100 in Robbinsdale because the current Corvallis "escape route" to Bottineau Blvd would be closed by the same train.
- j. With the proposed connection in place, significant increases in noise and vibration can be expected for businesses and residences in close proximity to the BNSF track. A thorough environmental review process including an Environmental Impact Statement is essential to fully understanding the impacts of the proposed connection.

## **2. The Permitting Process**

- a. The City's legal counsel have advised that the proposed rail connection is not subject to any local, county or state permitting or review processes.
- b. MnDOT staff indicates that their role is to simply assess grade crossing safety.
- c. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Surface Transportation Board (STB) is responsible for issuing a certificate of authorization for such a connection and directs any environmental review process.
- d. If the STB determines that an Environmental Impact Statement is required, that process includes a public comment period to provide for community and citizen input on this project.
- e. BNSF representatives stated in a 2/4/15 meeting with Crystal staff that they are seeking a "class exemption" and that their in-house attorneys have advised that they need to acquire the properties necessary for the connection before filing with STB. The City believes that this is a strategy for BNSF to evade the normal federal requirement for an EIS thus reducing consideration of the impacts on the communities along the BNSF line. BNSF is taking a significant financial risk by buying property before filing anything with STB, which suggests BNSF is aware that the impacts of the connection will be significant.

## **3. MnDOT Rail Crossing and Safety Study**

MnDOT's safety study completed in December 2014 did not consider this proposed connector track or its impacts.