



## **PROPOSED SLRT PLAN UNACCEPTABLE, SAYS TC&W PRESIDENT**

### ***Proposed plan for Southwest Light Rail Transitway (SLRT) fails to address freight rail reroute design safety, efficiency and cost concerns***

Glencoe, MN (January 3, 2013)—The president of Twin Cities and Western Railroad (TC&W) has officially notified Hennepin County officials that the proposed design for rerouting of freight rail service to accommodate the Southwest Light Rail Transitway (SLRT) “fails to meet recognized standards of engineering and safety.”

Mark Wegner’s comments appeared in a letter accompanying TC&W’s detailed response to the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) published by Hennepin County in October. December 31 was the final deadline for submission of response comments.

The DEIS describes a “locally preferred alternative” route that would require relocation of TC&W’s freight rail line. Before that route can be approved by federal regulatory agencies and become eligible for federal funding, the freight railroad must sign off on the proposed relocation plan and relinquish its rights to its current route. Federal rail policy requires that the interests of freight rail operators and shippers be considered in the development of passenger rail projects.

TC&W is a key player in the economic health of western Minnesota and eastern South Dakota, Wegner said, providing farmers and manufacturers across the region with vital access to national and international markets. He said the proposed changes to the existing freight rail route have the potential to produce negative impacts on the “availability, safety, efficiency and cost of the freight rail service our customers depend on.”

“We always have been supportive of the light rail project, as long as it is implemented in a way that preserves our ability to provide our customers with safe and efficient service at the same costs they now pay,” said Wegner. “However, this design does not meet those tests.”

An earlier design of the reroute plan which had more moderate grade increases and gentler curves was presented to TC&W officials in 2008, but that design never made it into the DEIS, Wegner said. Hennepin County staff members were notified more than a year ago that the “locally preferred alternative” was not acceptable to TC&W due to safety, efficiency and cost concerns.

“We hope that Hennepin County and the Met Council respond quickly and decisively to our input,” Wegner said. “We want to be able to support the SLRT project and work constructively with the jurisdictions involved, but we can’t give up our right to operate on our existing route unless we are satisfied that the relocation plan is comparable in safety, efficiency and cost to what we have now.”

Wegner’s letter and the full TC&W response to the DEIS are available on the railroad’s website at <http://www.tcwr.net>, along with other key documents and appendices.