



Governor's Council on Freight Rail

2025 Annual Report

January 2025

Prepared by:

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Governor's Council on Freight Rail

The Governor's Council on Freight Rail (the Council) was established to elevate coordination and partnership between the State and railroads, to actively promote safety and reduce risks, and to ensure efficient movement of goods to support our economy while minimizing the impacts of those operations on our local communities.

[Executive Order 24-02; Amending Executive Order 19-19](#)

[Executive Order 19-19; Rescinding Executive Order 16-06](#)

Governor's Council on Freight Rail Membership

Membership in the Council is pursuant to Executive Order 24-02. There are no open appointments. The Governor or the Governor's designee will serve as the Chair of the Council.

- Chair, MnDOT Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger
- Department of Agriculture, Commissioner Thom Petersen
- Employment and Economic Development, Commissioner Matt Varilek
- Metropolitan Council, Chair Charlie Zelle
- Pollution Control Agency, Commissioner Katrina Kessler
- Department of Public Safety, Assistant Commissioner John Cunningham
- Class 1 Railroad, Kevin Donahue
- Class 1 Railroad, Larry Lloyd
- Class 1 Railroad, Kelli O'Brien
- Class 1 Railroad, Lydia Underdahl
- Class II and III Railroad, Peter Gilbertsen
- Class II and III Railroad, Dan Kippley
- Class II and III Railroad, Mark Wegner
- Amtrak, Martin A. Sandoval II
- League of Minnesota Cities, Levi Novacek
- Association of Minnesota Counties, Heidi Nelson
- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Grant Johnson
- Labor Union, Nicholas Katich, SMART-TD
- Labor Union, Joel Mueller, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen.

The Governor's Council on Freight Rail Meetings

This is a report on the activities of the Council. The Council has no recommendations for actions needed to improve freight rail operations in the State of Minnesota at this time.

All meetings were held in person:

- October 24, 2023
- April 2, 2024
- November 13, 2024

Activities of the Council

October 24, 2023

Governor Tim Walz thanked the Council for their service and emphasized the need for the Council to think holistically towards the future to ensure Minnesota has a diversified and connected economy.

Update from MnDOT Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations (OFCVO), including state rail safety inspection program, Minnesota Rail Service Improvement Program (MRSI), and rail grade crossing safety.

Update from Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee.

MPCA, in collaboration with Deputy Chief Fire Marshal, led a discussion on emergency preparedness and response. The discussion primarily focused on changes to MN Statute 115E and MN statute 219 for emergency preparedness and response.

April 2, 2024

Minnesota Executive Order 19-19 requires the State to work with key stakeholders, including labor unions, in evaluating the array of issues impacting freight rail operations. The perspective of labor unions has been invaluable to maintaining safe and efficient freight rail operations in Minnesota. To recognize their contributions, Governor Walz made changes to the makeup of the Council to formally include representatives from labor unions.

The Council heard a presentation on The Willmar Rail Connector and Industrial Access Design-Build Project (The Willmar Wye). This project was awarded a regional 2023 America's Transportation Award administered by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). The award was for Quality of Life/Community Development-

Activities of the Council (continued)

Medium. Projects for this award were judged based on how they benefited the community, improved lives, contributed to future economic growth, and included public support, community involvement, and effective partnerships.

DPS Assistant Commissioner briefed the Council on emergency preparedness and response protocol, as follow up to the discussion the Council had in October 2023.

The Council was briefed on the issue of railroad police that is being deliberated in the Legislature. The Council engaged with industry on the issue in support of the effort to authorize railroad police in Minnesota.

November 13, 2024

Council was provided a review of current State Rail Plan projects, including information on plan updates, and schedule.

The Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act (IIJA) introduced 16 new congressionally specified requirements for State Freight Plans. Council was provided an update and schedule for revision of the Minnesota State Freight Plan.

As directed by the Legislature, MnDOT will be commissioning a wayside detector study, due in January 2026. The Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations (OFCVO) explained the plan for completing the study, including engagement with industry. The study will be a comprehensive review of safety, fiscal impacts, and operational effectiveness of wayside detectors.

Minnesota Regional Railroad Association (MRRA) provided an overview and update of the newly created Minnesota Railroad Police program. Railroad police were authorized by the Legislature in the 2024 legislative session.