

Key Findings from SEH Tech Memo #4

Physical Characteristics

1. Kenilworth is generally physically a better rail corridor; less grades, gentler curves, fewer single family homes in close proximity to tracks, fewer at grade crossings, and no community facility comparable to SLP HS on the route.
2. Kenilworth corridor is already occupied by the regional trail and will include the LRT line. This complicates accommodating freight rail in terms of fit and operational safety even with the Regional Trail relocated.
3. TCW use of the MN&S is an intensification of the use of an existing track. TCW permanently routed through Kenilworth is means two rail functions for the corridor where one rail function takes place today.
4. Freight train traffic in Kenilworth will require at least partial relocation of the regional bike trail to an as yet undetermined location.

Safety

5. There are safety benefits and downsides to both the MN&S and the Kenilworth routes for SLP from a safety perspective. The MN&S route is clearly better from a traffic/train hazard perspective and regional trail access perspective (e.g. Wooddale and Beltline); but, it exposes the High School area and more single family homes to train impacts than the Kenilworth route.
6. The MN&S route eliminates 2 major at grade crossings (Beltline and Wooddale) and approximately 1 1/4 mile of freight rail tracks in St. Louis Park.

Switching

7. Neither route as currently conceived addresses future skunk hollow switching adequately. The MN&S route marginally addresses the switching issue by providing a northbound connection to the MN&S tracks, which conceivably could be used to access MN&S southbound as well. However this technique increases the impacts on the neighborhoods to the north of Hwy 7.

Whistle Quiet Zone (WQZ)

8. Implementation of a WQZ would be of benefit to the community. It would reduce noise impacts and upgrade track on the MN&S route. These are improvements that are not likely to occur without rerouting of TCW trains to MN&S.

Vibration Impacts

9. Vibration impacts need further study. Conflicting analyses leave the level of impact likely to be experienced uncertain. More work is needed on this topic.

Costs

10. The raw construction cost for the Kenilworth appears to be a less expensive route than the MN&S route depending on exactly how much acquisition is done. It also leaves as an open question the issue of the cost of relocating the regional trail, potential costs to accommodating freight rail at LRT stations and whatever mitigation requirements emerge from a more detailed design process involving the City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Parks and Minneapolis residents.

LRT & Station Area Development

11. Kenilworth route complicates the Wooddale and Beltline Blvd LRT station designs, especially access to the stations. It also may potentially affect ridership.

12. The Kenilworth route is a negative influence on redevelopment around the LRT stations, but it certainly does not eliminate the potential. The Wooddale station area has seen significant redevelopment even with the existing freight rail traffic present.
13. Presence of freight rail at Beltline Blvd creates significant traffic issues that would require grade separating freight rail from Beltline Blvd traffic to be solved. Today when freight trains are present at peak hours, significant back ups occur. This disruption is likely to get worse in the future as more development occurs in this area and with the opening of a LRT station at Beltline Blvd.

Mitigation: Protecting Single Family Homes

14. Acquisition of properties on the east side of the existing MN&S tracks could significantly improve safety, reduce noise and vibration impacts and provide other potential community benefits (potential trail) for the portion of the MN&S route through single family residential areas.

Mitigation: Maintaining Mobility

15. Creation of a new grade separated Hwy 7, north side frontage road would greatly reduce the disruption creating by train traffic on vehicle movements in the Lake St, Walker, Wooddale/Dakota area. This would be particularly beneficial for access between the High School and the Central Community Center.
16. The potential for train induced back-ups on Lake Street extending all the way onto Hwy 7 are real and unacceptable and could reduce the effectiveness of a new grade separated frontage road on the north side of Hwy 7. Closure of the Lake Street/Hwy 7 access would improve this situation but would require the new Hwy 7/Louisiana interchange be constructed.

High School/Lake Street Issues

17. Reducing noise and vibration impacts and expanding the buffer between the land uses and the MN&S tracks in the vicinity of the High School and the Lake street commercial area are extremely difficult. Further study needed for how to reduce vibration/noise impacts on the High School. Any expansion of rail buffer space or ROW would require acquisition of virtually all the parcels from Lake Street Park to Library Lane along the NW side of Lake Street.
18. Improving access across the MN&S tracks in the vicinity of the High School is very difficult. Improved gating of sidewalks and at grade street crossings can be installed, however grade separated pedestrian crossings would be difficult to construct and difficult to locate in a way that they would actually be used.

Property Values

19. According the City Assessor future changes in rail routes and traffic volume may influence property values in St. Louis Park. Proximity to railroad tracks can have an affect on property values as can proximity to freeways and other external influences. Valuation professionals such as appraisers and assessors carefully review market transactions in developing adjustment factors for external influences along with many other market attributes. Speculation on short term or long term influence can vary considerably as does the market response from individual buyers and sellers. The assessing office reports that their current annual modeling of market values varies within a range of 3-12% along rail tracks, highways and other similar external influences. Property valuation studies

referenced in comments from residents appear to be based on analysis of changes in train traffic of from 10 to 45 trains per day. Proposed changes on the MN&S are 4 to 6 trains per day.

Viability of Kenilworth for Freight Rail

20. The analysis of Kenilworth as a potential route for freight rail, suggests that it is potentially a viable alternative to the MN&S route.

Jurisdictional Complexity

21. Both the MN&S and Kenilworth routes carry with them questions about acceptability to the railroads. The MN&S route's steeper grades, bridges and elevated tracks raise operational issues for the railroads. The sharing the corridor and the spacing between tracks are open issues with the railroads regarding the Kenilworth route.
22. The Kenilworth route carries with it increased jurisdictional complexity. The City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Park Board, the Kenilworth neighborhood organizations, and the organizations involved with the regional trail all would need to be involved in the Kenilworth route decision in some way.
23. Use of the Kenilworth corridor as the permanent home for TCW trains would affect the SWLRT DEIS and in particular the "4f" analysis regarding potential impacts on parkland.