

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## North Dakota to implement stakeholder and public outreach phase of statewide rail plan this fall

Six state agencies led by the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT), are collaborating on a new state rail plan that will provide guidance for the rail systems and services used by North Dakota passengers and freight shippers for at least the next 20 years. The other agencies are: the North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC), North Dakota Department of Commerce (NDDOC), the North Dakota Department of Emergency Service (NDDDES), the North Dakota Pipeline Authority, and the Upper Great Plain Transportation Institute (UGPTI).

The partners are working together to update the current rail plan that was completed in 2007. The effort will collaboratively establish a shared vision for North Dakota's rail system. The plan will assess the rail system and offer recommendations for policies, programs, processes, and projects that will improve rail-related safety and service.

"It is important for North Dakota to establish a shared vision for passenger and freight rail transports," North Dakota Commerce Commissioner Al Anderson said. "This plan is a vital component of our overall transportation system and one of the keys to North Dakota's continued economic growth and success."

"Our state's two largest industries - agriculture and energy - depend on rail service to transport a bulk of their products to market," PSC Commissioner Julie Fedorchak said. "Having a rail system that is efficient, accessible to North Dakota customers and trusted by citizens is essential. Through this process we hope to improve on each of those key issues."

The updated comprehensive plan is evaluating the overall rail system by reviewing:

- Railroad condition including railroad crossings and rail lines
- Train speeds
- Existing railroad freight and passenger demands and future needs
- Emergency response procedures in the state
- Tank car specifications
- Economic, safety, and environmental impacts on the state, including "tradeoffs" with other modes such as highways, pipeline, and air.

Parsons Brinckerhoff Inc. has been named the transportation engineering and planning firm to lead the plan development, after being selected through a competitive bid process that brought responses from rail industry experts across the United States. Parsons Brinckerhoff Inc. is a recognized leader in developing rail plans, and has assembled a team that combines local familiarity with national rail expertise.

The first major task is gathering stakeholder and public input which will include expert roundtable meetings, public meetings, and individual interviews. A public internet survey is under development and will launch sometime in the coming months.

"The stakeholder and public outreach phase is a critical component of the plan," said Grant Levi, NDDOT director. "By working closely with the public and rail partners we can more effectively understand rail transportations needs and opportunities to safely move people and goods."

“A safe and efficient rail system is important today and must meet the needs of our growing state,” said Greg Wilz, director of the NDDES. “Improving grade crossings and reducing times that crossings are congested with traffic will reduce accidents and improve delivery of emergency services.”

Work on the NDDOT State Rail Plan is divided into three phases:

- Phase I - Establishing the Current Rail System Baseline. This work is currently underway and is expected to wrap up in early 2016.
- Phase II - Identification of North Dakota Rail Needs/Opportunities. This phase will start in 2016 and is targeting spring 2016 for completion.
- Phase III - Rail Service and Investment Program. The final phase of the plan development is planned for completion by the end of fall 2016.

“This may be the most important rail plan since the original one was developed in 1980. Rail traffic volumes have increased dramatically since 2007, when the last update to the plan was published,” said Denver Tolliver, director of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute. “A new plan is necessary to guide state policies and ensure that businesses in the state enjoy the best rail services possible. Safe, cost-effective, and reliable railroad services are vital to North Dakota’s agricultural, energy, and manufacturing industries.”

Information on the statewide rail plan can be found at <http://railplan.dot.nd.gov>