

APPENDIX D

ROCKFORD RAILROAD CONSOLIDATION STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rockford Railroad Consolidation Study was initiated by the City of Rockford, Illinois to serve as an important element of a plan to develop balanced intermodal transportation in the City of Rockford. A study program was undertaken to meet the transportation requirements identified by the City arising from multiple constituencies in the Rockford area. The study objective is to develop a balanced program of elements for intermodal transportation in Rockford and the Rock River Valley that meet industry's freight service needs, the operating requirements of freight transportation providers, and the City of Rockford's land use and transportation goals.

The Rockford Area has a multimodal transportation system. Improvements have emphasized the maintenance of the existing system to relieve congestion, provide safety features, and improve the overall transportation system. Rail and rail services have remained an important feature and element in the Study Area. Four rail carriers serve the area:

- ▶ Canadian National/Illinois Central (CN/IC) Railway – East-west mainline between Chicago and Omaha, Nebraska.
- ▶ Illinois RailNet (IR) – Shortline carrier operating between Burlington Northern Santa Fe's main line and Rochelle, IL and Rockford.
- ▶ Iowa, Chicago and Eastern, (ICE) Railroad – Regional carrier with direct access to Chicago and Kansas City. ICE operates through Rockford en route to its terminus in Janesville, Wisconsin. South of Rockford, the ICE shares track with Illinois RailNet to the connection with the ICE main line at Davis Junction, Illinois.
- ▶ Union Pacific (UP) Railroad – Branch line with Rockford as its western terminus. A major auto plant at Belvidere, Illinois is the economic "anchor" of this line that connects major areas of growth between Rockford and the core of the region.

Maintenance of the rail infrastructure is primarily the responsibility of the private rail carrier. The City of Rockford, however, continues to work with rail operators on projects that will enhance the efficient movement of freight through the region, eliminate vehicular conflicts, and provide new development opportunities.

Two primary railroad consolidation alternatives were developed during this study. The route alternatives (CN/IC Bridge and UP Bridge) across the Rock River were formulated after meeting with the four railroads, the area's numerous industries, and Rockford's other stakeholders including regional and local agencies. The alternatives were evaluated on the basis of factors such as: operating features, infrastructure elements, land use opportunities, and roadway improvements. An estimate of program costs was prepared for each element of the alternatives.

The four railroads were contacted after the first meetings and sent a description of the alternatives, drawings of the alternatives, and the evaluation of each. The railroads were asked for comments in the form of preferences, railroad operating priorities, capital costs and, expected benefits, and resources and constraints for future implementation. The railroads that commented were supportive of the CN/IC Bridge over the Rock River alternative, and expressed interest that the project moves forward to the next steps by the City of Rockford.

The selection of one of the alternatives, or a combination of accepted elements of each, will provide numerous benefits in the area. Beneficiaries of the improvements identified in the study will be the railroads, the users of the rail service, and the public. The railroads should benefit from

line segment abandonment and improved operations leading to reductions in related operating and capital expenses. Benefits could accrue to rail users in terms of better service and perhaps a more competitive local rail system. Public benefits should result from land use development potential and reduced congestion through grade crossing elimination and/or modification. For example, the CN/IC bridge consolidation option could free up approximately 10,000 feet of track for potential alternate uses; six bridges (roadway over railroad, and railroad over roadway) would not be required and some might have alternate uses; and, at least nine grade crossings would be eliminated adding to safety improvements, reduced maintenance, and future capital construction savings in the area. An action plan towards implementation of an acceptable alternative should be developed to include:

- ▶ Announce to all area rail carriers the City's interest in pursuing the CN/IC bridge consolidation option.
- ▶ Invite the rail carriers of the area to a planning meeting to discuss next steps for the consolidation initiative.
- ▶ Develop "straw dog" operations and implementation plan for the rail consolidation to serve as a base point for discussion.
- ▶ Facilitate rail carrier meetings and exchanges to identify and create all required agreements to effect the rail operations consolidation.
- ▶ Confirm suitability of alternative commuter rail station sites given a new operations configuration for carriers in the area.
- ▶ Develop alternate use plan for public access to vacated rail corridors.

The Rockford area will continue to experience steady growth in the years ahead. This study has identified a rail infrastructure and operations strategy that could complement this growth, enhance mobility and open under-utilized corridors to new uses.

Strategies to attract private participation in such improvements will rely in large part on the development of private-sector benefits as justification for such investments. The City of Rockford has a plan that can be further refined and studied in subsequent engineering work and coordination with the railroads and the affected stakeholders. The City of Rockford has every reason to be proud of their accomplishment in developing this investment strategy. There are many reasons to see that the investment strategy is carried out. A more clearly-defined public sector vision for the released alignments and river crossings can also serve to attract new stakeholders who may be willing to contribute to the plan. Achieving detailed consensus of various stakeholders, implementing the rail plan, and refining the public vision of the corridors will position Rockford to re-build its downtown core as a wave of economic growth continues to expand westward from the Chicago metropolitan area to Belvidere and Rockford.