

Post-Bulletin

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Zip Rail decision delayed by public feedback

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Due to the high volume of public comments received by MnDOT about the proposed Zip Rail project, officials have delayed the release of a document that evaluates the project's potential sites.

The project would connect Rochester to the Twin Cities with high-speed rail.

The scoping document was expected to be complete in 15 days. There is no new timetable given for the document's release.

More importantly to critics, the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement's Final Scoping Decision will also include a no-build option, according to a Sept. 19 press release from Minnesota Department of Transportation spokeswoman Mary McFarland Brooks.

The lack of a no-build option was a point of contention for citizens who attended a public forum this summer at Kenyon-Wanamingo High School. Zip Rail project manager Chuck Michael insisted that not building the project was always an option, but many citizens felt it was mentioned only as an afterthought and was not truly being considered.

Minnesota Farm Bureau president Kevin Paap took that criticism a step further with his written comment that said: "The perception appears to be that the project has a pre-determined authorization already, and the public input process is structured to get around the possibility of an alternate for not going forward."

Critics of the Zip Rail project from Goodhue, Dodge and Olmsted counties have hired [Cato Institute Senior Fellow Randal O'Toole](#) to address some of their lingering concerns. He will speak during a free event at 7 p.m. Sept. 29 in the Rochester International Event Center. A press release touts O'Toole as a "national expert on economic realities of high-speed rail developments over the past 20 years (who) will share research about high-speed rail and its true costs."

O'Toole is a noted critic of light rail who has written five books about land use and transportation issues that focus on private land rights. He previously spoke against Zip Rail at the Goodhue County Fair.

At least [three area cities and two counties filed comments by the Aug. 22 deadline that were critical of the Zip Rail proposal](#). But entities in Rochester appear united in their vision of connecting with the Twin Cities.

Olmsted County, Rochester, the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce and the Mayo Clinic have been pushing the high-speed rail idea since 2008, when they formed an advocacy group called the Southeast Minnesota Rail Alliance.

"The Zip Rail proposal is not a Rochester project, it has wide-ranging benefits to our region and the state in bringing two growing and vibrant economies closer together," Olmsted County commissioner Paul Wilson wrote in a recent Post-Bulletin letter to the editor.