

“Recharge the Range” Infrastructure Action Group

Q4 2016 Meeting – 12/5/16

The Rink – Eveleth, MN

AGENDA

3:00 - 3:10 PM Arrive/Networking

3:10 - 3:20 Welcome & Introductions

3:20 - 3:30 Re-Cap of Previous Meetings

3:30 - 4:45 Updates from Sub-Groups:

3:30 - 3:45 Broadband

3:45 - 4:00 Local Government

4:00 - 4:15 Regional Rail

4:15 - 4:30 Regional Connections (Airports, light rail, highways, etc.)

4:30 - 5:00 Next Steps/Open Discussion

Q1 2017 Action Group Meeting: Set a date?

5:00 PM Adjourn

Infrastructure Focus Group
December 5th, 2016
The Rink Sports Bar and Grill
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

In Attendance: Jeff Borling, Doug Learmont, Mark Zimmerman, Jordan Metsa, Shawn Germolus, Sara Ferkul, Jim Plummer, Mark Bakk, Julie Marinucci, Lorrie Janatopolous, Harold Langowski, Steve Giorgi, John Fedo, Whitney Ridlon, Tom Whiteside, Latisha Gietzen, Bill Coleman and Kyle Hidaman

Discussion on subgroups and what the purpose of each is. Encouraged members to recruit additional members to main infrastructure group and into subgroups. Also, should we have a subgroup that is focused on Energy/Green Energy?

Education about the importance of infrastructure – current and new.

Subgroup updates:

Regional Rail:

Mark Zimmerman provided an update (handout provided). They are looking for participation from the East Range.

Broadband:

Discussed the importance of broadband in this region, the accessibility to businesses and residents to be competitive in an internet based economy, that all students should have the same opportunities and that access to broadband makes rural communities more attractive places to live. Went through the goals and current initiatives. The expansion of broadband to rural areas that are not served or underserved and to increase the use of broadband and technology in homes and businesses are the two main goals. And the support of the Iron Range Blandin Communities Program, the kickoff is November 30th and this will be a 2 year program. Also, to engage with area broadband providers to better understand their future expansion plans and identify the barriers. To optimize the 30 rural town hall connections made because of the NESC/Frontier Rural Broadband Project. And finally support any projects including any state and/or federal grant applications that will impact our region.

Local Government:

Been having meetings with mayors. Discussing issues with infrastructure, there is a shortfall on the Highway 53 project. Environmental issues play a giant part with completing new projects. Many communities have space available for new businesses but they may not be shovel ready. DEED offers a shovel ready site certification program. Is there an option to impose a small sales tax on cities/townships that can be used for economic development? The city of Virginia attempted however this did not pass.

Regional Connections:

Stressed the need for more members. Community support for connections infrastructure is important. Public transportation is a need. Possible shuttles between communities. What do we need? Highways, buses maybe a light rail – how do we make these things happen? There are limitations for people to get to work at times with the public transportation currently available. Especially if they work shift work.

Iron Range Regional Rail Initiative

Project Summary 12/05/2016

Over the last 16 months a substantial amount of effort has been completed on the Iron Range Regional Rail Initiative (IRRI). Due to lack of public funding, the effort to date has largely been focused on the West Range Connector Project, which has been industry funded, solely by Minnesota Power. Below is a list of activities that have been worked or initiated so far:

Public/Stakeholder Engagement:

Informational presentations to the following groups:

- Western Mesabi Mining Planning Board (2)
- Arrowhead Growth Alliance
- Laurentian Vision Partnership
- Itasca County Community Advisory Panel
- Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce luncheon
- Itasca County Board
- Blandin Foundation
- Public Meetings in Grand Rapids
- Iron Range Economic Alliance (IREA) meeting
- Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS)

Project development:

Feasibility assessment/Engineering evaluation- led by Krech Ojard Associates and Coalition members of the West Range Connector Project. This is partially completed and requires additional funding in order to complete.

- Development of rail alignments and routing options to support EIS (accomplished through three (3) day long meetings)
- Desktop Environmental Screening Project Alternatives
- Community Planning / Impacts Evaluation
- Preliminary engineering Rail Layout, Planning and Cost Evaluation
- Provided input including drawings, maps and illustrations for communication planning, stakeholder engagement, and public outreach ,
- GIS Spatial analysis of alternative centerlines within established corridor
- Utilities Impacts (Power, Gas, Pipeline, Water, Sewer, Communications, etc.)

- Evaluation and determination of permits required and permitting timelines
- Schedule, Cost Estimating and Execution Plan for preferred alignment
- Surface Transportation Board (STB) engagement and negotiations
- Define possible ownership/scenarios

Public Funding:

Multiple coalition members meet with State legislators in St Paul during last year's legislative session in an effort to secure additional public funding. Ultimately, there was language in a Senate bill that authorized \$1M from the Rail Service Improvement Account be granted to the City of Grand Rapids for funding of this project. Due to gridlock in the 2016 Legislature the bill was never passed.

Commercial Shipper Engagement:

Multiple meetings were held with CN to determine interest in additional tonnage shipping on the West Range. These meetings also focused on:

- Examining use of current cross range connector
- Analyzing service movements and switching,
- Determining necessary track upgrades
- Evaluation of legal rights to provide service to the current West Range shippers

Next steps:

In partnership with the City of Cohasset, the team has prepared two grant requests in order to complete the initial engineering assessment report. We need \$375,000 to complete the engineering assessment and we are submitting grants to the Blandin Foundation for \$50,000 and to IRRRB for \$325,000. Minnesota Power has already spent about \$2,000,000 to get us to this point. We are trying to get the report finalized either before the legislative session starts or early into the legislative session next year.