



## **Dan Patch line may bring commuter rail to Burnsville and Lakeville**

*by Dan Gearino; Staff Writer  
Posted 1/14/00*

The Metropolitan Council is looking into the possibility of a commuter rail from Minneapolis to Northfield along existing Canadian Pacific Railway tracks.

This was one of the many transit plans on display at the council's Jan. 6 open house at the Burnsville Transit Center.

The Canadian Pacific track that goes through Minneapolis, Edina, St. Louis Park, Bloomington, Savage, Burnsville, Lakeville and Northfield, has been dubbed the "Dan Patch Corridor," a reference to the Dan Patch passenger line that existed along the same tracks in the first couple decades of the 20th century. The original line was named after Col. Marion Savage's famous race horse.

The potential commuter rail route is in the early stages of a feasibility study that is being conducted by the Dakota County Office of Planning in conjunction with the 35W Solutions Alliance. The 35W group is made up of city and county officials from communities in the south metro along the 35W corridor.

Unlike commuter rail lines planned for Elk River and Hastings, the Dan Patch line goes through densely populated areas. Dense population contributes to the area's road congestion, some of the worst in the metro. The feasibility study will have to weigh the need to reduce traffic congestion against the concerns of neighbors who don't want passenger trains rumbling through their backyards and concerns of taxpayers about cost.

The local governments along the Dan Patch line are agreeing to participate in the feasibility study, but such cooperation should not be misinterpreted as support for the project. Rep. Ken Wolf (R-Burnsville) said that he believes the line will never be built because of neighborhood opposition. He added that some local governments are participating in the feasibility study just to make their citizens' objections known early in the process.

Wolf sees not-in-my-backyard opposition as somewhat problematic.

"We're in a catch-22," he said. "People want convenience, but don't want to pay the price." The price Wolf refers to is not financial cost, but rather perceived aesthetic damage to neighborhoods.

Many of those who live along the tracks already must deal with train noise. North of the river, trains run along the tracks several times a day. South of the river, though, trains run far less frequently. Some Burnsville residents haven't seen a train on the tracks in years. If the commuter line went through, the tracks would likely be modernized and traffic would increase substantially. Improved tracks may also mean more freight traffic. Canadian Pacific representative Mark Nordling said that traffic along the route will probably increase whether or not there is commuter rail. He said that his company is always in negotiations with freight customers to use the tracks.

While the tracks would need to be improved for the high safety standards of passenger travel, Nordling said that his company continually tests the tracks to make sure they remain viable for freight transport.

Burnsville City Engineer Chuck Ahl is a member of one of the feasibility study committees. He said that for at least the last five years the city has required that potential new homeowners along the tracks be informed by sellers that the route may see significantly increased usage in the future from commuter rail, increased freight traffic, or both. Still, Ahl said he suspects that sellers downplay this likelihood.

Ahl and several other committee members agree that the feasibility study boils down to one question: Will there be enough people riding to justify the financial and social cost? Even after a potential ridership analysis and cost estimates, it may be difficult for all of the parties involved to come to a consensus as to the answer. The feasibility study will continue until the winter of 2001.

---

[©Thisweek Newspapers](#)