TO: Mayor Shaun Sipma  
Members of the City Council

FROM: Lance Meyer, P.E., City Engineer

DATE: May 17, 2021

SUBJECT: LETTER TO SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD DOWNTOWN RAIL TRANSFER

I. RECOMMENDED ACTION
   1. Recommend Council authorize the Mayor to send a letter to the Surface Transportation Board stating the City’s concerns

II. DEPARTMENT CONTACT PERSONS

Lance Meyer, City Engineer 701-857-4100
Dan Jonasson, Director of Public Works 701-857-4140

III. DESCRIPTION

1. Background
   The City was contacted by CP Rail regarding their concerns about a transfer operation change with BNSF. A grain facility near Noonan is requesting unit train service by BNSF via a shared piece of track that runs to the facility.

   CP Rail and BNSF provide service to the facility by sending blocks of cars that are transferred from CP to BNSF in Minot. The car transfer is approximately 25 cars and has a small impact to the City and its rail crossings.

   In the call with CP Rail, they indicated that the unit train transfer between the railroads would block all crossings from the Amtrak station through 8th Avenue SE or essentially all at grade crossings for at least 35 minutes and up to one hour.

   The Mayor and staff called BNSF to hear their understanding of the issue. BNSF relayed to the City that the unit train transfer can happen on a long siding CP Rail owns on the east side of Minot rather than downtown. BNSF can handle the switching and inspection duties at all hours of the day and said it is possible the transfer could happen at night reducing the impact to the City.

2. Proposed Project
   The dispute between CP Rail and BNSF is being reviewed by the Surface Transportation Board (STB), which is a government oversight board for railroad activities. The STB has already ruled that CP Rail must allow BNSF unit train service to the grain facility. However, the City could send a letter to the STB asking that consideration be given to how the transfer between railroads will affect the City.
City staff has several concerns about a switch operation being conducted in downtown Minot.

First, seven at grade crossings would be blocked anywhere from 15 to 60 minutes, two to three times a month. This will create major traffic disruptions, particularly on 3rd St which carries almost 7,000 vehicles a day.

In addition, with several crossings blocked at the same time, emergency responders will have to travel approximately 1.5 miles extra in some instances which adds several minutes to a response. This is especially concerning for a medical call where every second counts to save a life.

Last, the City has invested millions in revitalizing and supporting downtown business owners. Having transportation access restricted or cut off completely in some instances will have a negative effect on business owner operations and their customer experience.

With these primary concerns in mind, it is staff’s opinion that a letter should be sent to the STB relaying these concerns and asking them to direct the switching operations happen somewhere outside of Minot for the safety and convenience of our citizens.

3. **Consultant Selection**
   N/A

### IV. IMPACT:

1. **Strategic Impact:**
   N/A

   B. **Service/Delivery Impact:**
   N/A

   C. **Fiscal Impact:**
   N/A

### V. ALTERNATIVES

Council could choose not to send the letter.

Council could choose to modify the attached letter.

### VI. TIME CONSTRAINTS

The STB is taking comment on this issue and a timely response by the Council will ensure our comments are received.

### VII. LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

A. Letter to STB
B. CP Minot Siding