

County State Aid Highway 24 (CSAH 24)..aka Van Lynn Road – Public Informational Meeting

Wednesday May 23, 2018; Koochiching County Courthouse, 3rd Floor Courtroom

Welcome and Introductions

Purpose of this meeting

- Review road and bridge project options
- Solicit public input
- Talk about next steps

WHY ARE WE HAVING THIS DISCUSSION AT THIS TIME ??

Two Main reasons:

- 1) The **increasing volume of freight rail traffic** entering the United States at the Ranier Port of Entry, combined with the diverse types of cargo hauled by the CN trains, provide great incentive for Koochiching County to make strategic improvements to the road & bridge network – especially for those areas of the County that are most impacted by CN RR freight rail traffic
- 2) **Optimize routes for emergency responders and the traveling public** – for maximum practical public safety. Replacing the CSAH 24 grade crossing with a bridge – and extending CSAH 24 to connect with TH 11 – would greatly improve public safety and provide considerable convenience for the traveling public and emergency responders.

Please **see attached letter from Tony Jackson**, Port Director, US Customs and Border Protection, which contains the following: “...Kooch County should give strong consideration to the connection of CSAH 24 to TH 11....”.

The Ranier Port of Entry, which handles appx. 19% of all of the freight rail traffic that enters the United States, is the **busiest rail port** in the United States.

Appx. 24 trains per day pass through Ranier and Kooch County – of those 24 daily trains, appx. 12 trains are coming into the United States and appx. 12 trains are leaving the United States.



Photo: CSAH 20 grade crossing looking west toward steel lift bridge



Photo: Ranier Train Station Bldg; office location for US Customs & Border Protection



Photo: CSAH 20 grade crossing (downtown Ranier) looking east



Photo: CSAH 20 grade crossing (downtown Ranier) looking south

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WHY ARE WE HAVING THIS DISCUSSION AT THIS TIME ?? cont'd.

Freight Trains are increasing in length. Of the appx. 12 trains coming into the United States through Ranier each day, cargo for appx. 8 of every 12 trains originate in Canada, and cargo for appx. 4 of every 12 trains originate in Asia. Trains carrying containers, which originated in Asia, are sometimes referred to as **Intermodal Trains**. Intermodal trains are typically **10,000 to 12,000 feet long** (appx. 2.1 miles long). Canadian trains, comprised mostly of cargo that originated in Canada, tend to be slightly shorter than Intermodal trains. As trains get longer, delays experienced by motorists at RR grade crossings are likely to increase.



Photo: typical CN intermodal train with containers



Photo: typical CN intermodal train with containers



Photo: CSAH 24 grade crossing looking north



Photo: CSAH 24 grade crossing looking south



Photo: CSAH 24 grade crossing looking west



Photo: CSAH 24 grade crossing looking east

RECOMMENDED ROAD AND BRIDGE IMPROVEMENTS

Construct CSAH 24 extension to TH 11 and construct CSAH 24 bridge over the CN RR tracks.

Doing so, we believe, will eliminate the “no outlet” condition of CSAH 24 and provide an important roadway and bridge connection that will provide additional connectivity and greatly improved public safety, resulting in greater convenience for routine travel and unobstructed travel during emergencies.

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Questions and Answers

Question 1: What if we only **construct a bridge** to carry CSAH 24 over the CN tracks, and do NOT extend CSAH 24 to meet TH 11?

Answer: The bridge would **simplify daily travel** for homeowners, motorists, school bus drivers, etc. on the east side of the tracks. The bridge would provide for the **most direct and reliable route** for motorists and emergency responders that need to get east of the tracks. No doubt that the bridge would be a very welcome addition to the neighborhood.

The TH 11 bridge over the CN RR tracks provides the only grade separated crossing over the CN RR tracks in the area. The next closest bridge over the CN tracks is on TH 53 in Ray. Construction of a new CSAH 24 bridge over the CN RR tracks is required to provide a companion to the TH 11 bridge over the CN RR tracks. By having **two bridges available**, each of which provide a grade separated crossing over the CN RR Tracks, we have greatly increased our ability to get emergency services east of the tracks on one of the bridges, even if the other bridge is closed due to a rail incident.

If a CSAH 24 bridge over the CN RR tracks was constructed, without also constructing a roadway extension to TH 11, the new bridge would serve a **no outlet road** (undesirable), and we would not be providing an alternate route to provide connectivity to the lake area in times when a rail incident requires closure of the train crossings in Ranier. We're not certain if that is a cost-effective investment – especially given the County's limited road/bridge funds.

if there were a train emergency that required closure of CSAH 20 and the TH 11 bridge in Ranier, a bridge would ensure CSAH 24 access over the CN RR tracks, but the bridge would NOT help to get motorists and emergency responders to connect with TH 11 and the lake area. A **CSAH 24 roadway connection** to TH 11 is required to provide connectivity to TH 11, in the event that a train incident requires closure of the CSAH 20 grade crossing and TH 11 bridge over the CN tracks in Ranier.

Related thoughts: Preparation of construction plans and securing of environmental permits for a bridge project would be simpler & faster than what would be required for the road extension. As a result, the bridge project would likely be ready for construction before the road project.



Stock photo – roadway bridge over RR tracks



Stock photo – roadway bridge over RR tracks



Stock photo – bridge over RR tracks



Stock photo – bridge over RR tracks

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Questions and Answers

Question 2: What if we **construct a CSAH 24 road extension** to TH 11 and do NOT construct a bridge to carry CSAH 24 over the CN tracks?

Answer: A CSAH 24 roadway connection to TH 11 would provide an **alternate route** for emergency responders to use when the CSAH 24 grade crossing is blocked and emergency responders need to get to an **east end Van Lynn Road** resident or property. In that situation, the CSAH 24 connection to TH 11 would be very beneficial to folks on the east end of Van Lynn Rd.

A CSAH 24 extension to TH 11 would also provide an **alternate route to/from the lake area** – if there was a train incident that required closure of the CSAH 20 grade x-ing and the TH 11 bridge over the CN tracks in Ranier. Having an alternate road link in the form of a CSAH 24 extension to TH 11 could be very beneficial to lake area residents & tourists.

We examined **travel time** for two routes : route 1) Intl Falls Fire Hall east on TH 11, south on CSAH 155 and CSAH 332, east on CSAH 24 to resident on UT 282, and route 2) Intl Falls fire hall to east TH 11, south on the new CSAH 24 extension, west on CSAH 24 to UT 282. One-way travel time for route 1 was estimated at **appx. 7-8 minutes** and one-way travel time for route 2 was estimated at **appx. 10-11 minutes**. Although alternate route 2 would take longer to drive than primary route 1, the reliability of alternate route 2, and knowing that trains will never be blocking alternate route 2, might more than make up for the increased travel time experienced on route 2. We are interested to get meeting attendees input on the travel time analysis.

Having a **CSAH 24 extension** to TH 11 would benefit the community in many ways, including those listed above. For all the benefits of a CSAH 24 road extension to TH 11, there are **a few shortcomings**: The CSAH 24 road extension does not provide for the shortest and fastest route from Int'l Falls to Van Lynn east side residents – in the way that a bridge over the CN tracks would. Also, if there were a train emergency that required closure of CSAH 20 and the TH 11 bridge in Ranier, and trains were simultaneously blocking the CSAH 24 grade crossing – the CSAH 24 extension would not be of use to emergency responders or lake area folks. However, if there were a CSAH 24 bridge over the CN tracks, then the CSAH 24 extension would provide the required road link even if an emergency rail incident included a disabled train at the CSAH 24 crossing area and closure of the CSAH 20 grade x-ing and TH 11 bridge over the CN RR tracks in Ranier.

Boats could be used in the summer to shuttle emergency responders and citizens from Intl Falls (Rainy River) to the Lake Area – and with use of vehicles – emergency responders could get to the east end of CSAH 24 and the lake area. While the boat and car shuttle option might be available in the spring/summer/fall months, the boat and car shuttle option are not available in the winter months due to the absence of reliable ice on parts of Rainy Lake and Rainy River.

The CSAH 24 road extension to TH 11 would be a very valuable addition to the local road infrastructure, and would facilitate access in many emergency situations. An even wider range of emergency conditions could be covered if a new bridge was constructed to carry CSAH 24 over the CN RR Tracks.



Stock photo: road construction in wooded area



Stock photo: road construction in wooded area

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Questions and Answers

Question 3: Has there been any **recent train incidents** that required road closures or resulted in loss of road access?

Answer: Yes, CSAH 98 at CN tracks over Rat Root River in June 2015. Photos below illustrate train derailment and bridge failure on the CN RR tracks just south of the CSAH 98 grade crossing with the CN RR tracks, north of Ericsburg, June 2015. This train incident occurred just south of the CSAH 98 grade crossing with the CN RR tracks – on the CN RR bridge over the Rat Root River - so CSAH 98 was not closed as a direct result of the train derailment.

However, CSAH 98 was closed to thru traffic for several days to allow space for emergency response crews to stage their equipment and materials. The fact that CSAH 98 is a loop road, with a northerly connection to TH 53 near Roger’s Corner and a southerly connection to TH 53 by Slat’s Bar, proved to be very valuable to local residents, emergency responders, CN rail crews, and construction crews.



Photo: CN RR bridge failure just south of CSAH 98 in Ericsburg, June 2015



Photo: CN RR bridge failure just south of CSAH 98 in Ericsburg, June 2015

Question 4: How much **extra traffic** will be using CSAH 24 – if CSAH 24 is extended to meet TH 11?

Answer: We don’t have that information at this time. We feel that a relatively small percentage of traffic on TH 11 would use the CSAH 24 extension as a shortcut to TH 53 southbound. Once we select an LPA, we will work with MN/DOT traffic engineers to develop a projected traffic volume for the proposed CSAH 24 road extension.

Question 5: Will the CSAH 24 extension to TH 11 increase traffic on roads abutting CSAH 24...e.g. CR 93 near Rainy Lake One Stop?

Answer: We have reviewed this matter with the Mn/DOT traffic engineer. MN/DOT and Kooch County staff feel that the portion of CR 93 lying east of RLOS would likely see **little to no increase** in traffic volumes due to the proposed extension of CSAH 24 to join TH 11 at the present day CR 93 intersection, adjacent to RLOS.



2016 traffic count map (above) shows 125 vehicles per day on CR 93. That equates to appx 63 vehicles per day in each direction, which relates to appx 3 vehicles per hour, each direction. County staff and MN/DOT traffic staff feel that the portion of CR 93 lying east of RLOS would likely see little to no increase in traffic volumes due to the proposed extension of CSAH 24 to join TH 11 at CR 93.

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Question 6: How many **private property owners** are directly impacted by construction of a **new bridge** to carry CSAH 24 over the CN tracks?

Answer: There are appx. 9 property owners from whom the County would like to secure R/W or easements. The number of affected property owners varies amongst alignment options. County staff have developed a 3-span bridge design, per CN RR guidance, along with retaining walls extending west and east of the bridge, parallel to the road centerline. The retaining walls are costly, but are helpful at reducing construction limits and minimizing R/W impacts.



Stock photo: retaining wall (right) parallel to roadway



stock photo: retaining wall adjacent to bridge – *please disregard music scales*

Question 7: How many **private property owners** are directly impacted by **road extension** of CSAH 24 to join TH 11?

Answer: There are appx. 8 property owners from whom the County would like to secure R/W or easements. The number of affected property owners varies amongst alignment options. Please see attached exhibit.

Question 8: What is the estimated **construction cost** of extending CSAH 24 to TH 11 combined with construction of the CSAH 24 bridge over the CN RR tracks? Will CN RR contribute to the construction cost of the bridge?

Answer: Appx. \$11,000,000. It's our understanding in talking with MN/Dot Freight Rail Dept, that CN RR will need to contribute to the cost of the bridge in an amount equal to the value of the grade crossing (which will be removed). We are working with CN RR to verify their financial contribution to the bridge project.

Question 9: What **funding sources** does Kooch County intend to use to pay for the CSAH 24 extension and bridge?

Answer: A combination of Federal, State, and local dollars. **Federal Funds** and **State Bonding Funds** (legislative earmark), if awarded, typically cover appx 80-90% of the project costs and Kooch County would have to cover the remaining 10-20% of the project costs. If we were unsuccessful at receiving Federal Funds or State Bond (legislative earmark) funds, the County would need to use multiple annual allocations of **State Aid (gas tax revenue) funds** or the County would need to **sell bonds**. Annual state aid (gas tax) allocation is appx \$2.8M for Kooch County. Bonds would likely cost the County appx 3% interest, and could be paid back over a 20 year time period.

Question 10: Gravel Forestry road. If the CSAH 24 roadway extension to TH 11 is needed primarily to provide road access during emergency scenarios, why doesn't the County simply **construct a gravel road, similar to a forestry road**, that would be gated and closed to traffic at all times other than when the road is needed for emergency access?

Answer: Because of the high cost of the CSAH 24 road and bridge project, Kooch County is pursuing funding support from federal and state sources. The federal and state funds that we are pursuing are only available for construction of public roads to a prescribed set of road design standards. If we were to construct a gravel road, similar to a forestry/logging road, we would have to pay for that road with local funds. County staff have studied a gravel road option, and because of the rough terrain, low lying swamp type conditions, and 3+ mile length of road, even a gravel surfaced forestry type road would be quite expensive. We estimate construction of a gravel road that would connect the east end of CSAH 24 to TH 11 would cost appx. \$3,000,000. To my knowledge, Kooch County does not have sufficient local revenues to fund a project of that magnitude – and I'm not aware of funding sources for that type of road.

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Question 10: Gravel Forestry Road.....cont'd.

We have done considerable analysis on the gravel forestry road option. There have been instances in the past where the County has constructed a gravel forestry road, for purposes of managing timber. If the gravel forestry road meets applicable criteria, as determined by BWSR and US ACE, the County may not be required to mitigate wetland impacts – as would be required with a typical highway dept. project. There would be considerable savings to the County if a new road could be constructed – without wetland mitigation costs. However, as we found in our discussions with BWSR, it's not clear that a gravel road built to provide emergency access for the public and emergency responders, even if that roads also provides access for managing timber harvest, would satisfy BWSR and US ACE criteria for a forestry road. The uncertainty related to BWSR and US ACE exemptions for wetland mitigation, combined with the requirement that a gravel road would need to be funded with local dollars, would seem to disqualify the gravel road option from further consideration.



US Army Corps of Engineers

Question 11: Will **Special Assessments** be levied against the property owners along CSAH 24, or adjoining roads, as part of constructing the CSAH 24 road or bridge?

Answer: Kooch County has no plans to levy special assessments as a funding tool for this project

Question 12: Will **Property Taxes** be raised for residents along CSAH 24 or adjacent roadways – as a funding tool for this project?

Answer: Kooch County has no plans to raise property taxes for CSAH 24 residents, as a direct means of generating funds for this project

Question 13: What is the **schedule** for extending CSAH 24 to TH 11 and constructing the CSAH 24 bridge over the CN RR tracks?

Answer: Schedule is dependent on 3 main items: i) selection of preferred alternative; ii) funding, ii) environmental reviews; and wetland mitigation. In a best case scenario, construction could begin in year **2020**. If we experience funding shortfalls or permit approval delays, construction could be pushed back to year **2021**. The key item to move the project ahead at this time is selection of a locally preferred alternative (LPA). With an LPA, county staff can initiate the environmental review process and the wetland mitigation process – both of which require long lead times for permit approval.

SUMMARY AND REQUESTED ACTION ITEMS

Collect public input...please complete the **Comment Cards** and submit to the County

Confirm project priorities: Road Extension AND Bridge Overpass...OR...Road Extension only...OR....Bridge overpass only

Identify a locally preferred alternative (LPA)

Advance the design and update the project cost estimate

Advance the environmental review process...allow 12+ months for agency approval

Advance the wetland delineation, mitigation plan, and permitting process...allow 12-18 months for agency approval

Work towards final construction documents...make the project "shovel ready"

Shovel Ready projects: permits are secured; R/W is secured; final design is complete; local and regional support

Submit eligible project(s) for federal and state funding

Eligible projects that are deemed "shovel ready" are best positioned and most likely to secure outside funding support