

**Minutes of the  
East Wisconsin Counties Railroad Consortium  
Meeting of November 13, 2024**

**East Wisconsin Counties Railroad Consortium Meeting** was called to order by Chairman Thomas E. Winker on November 13, 2024, at approximately 10:00 a.m., at the Dodge County Administration Building, Administration Auditorium, 127 E. Oak Street, Juneau, Wisconsin.

The Consortium rose to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Certification of Public Notice:** Kelly Lepple certified that the notice of this meeting complies with all applicable requirements of Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law.

**Present:** Char Holtan and Darren W. Schroeder, Columbia County; Jeffrey Caine and Jim Mielke, Dodge County; John Zorn and Karen Madigan, Fond du Lac County; Dennis Mulder, Green Lake County; Tom Winker, Ozaukee County; Jon Kuhlow and Chuck Born, Sheboygan County; Jeff Schleif, Washington County; and Donald Nussbaum and Howard Miller, Winnebago County.

**Excused:** Charlie Wielgosh, Green Lake County; Shawn Rolland, Milwaukee County; Marty Wolf, Ozaukee County; and, Robert Hartwig, Washington County.

**Others Present:** Ben Mohlke, WisDOT; Ken Lucht, WSOR; and Kelly Lepple, Dodge County Corporation Counsel Office.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Approval of Draft Minutes of July 10, 2024:** Motion by Schroeder/Zorn to approve the minutes of July 10, 2024. Motion carried.

**Financial Report:** Jeff Caine reported for the period ending October 31, 2024. The balance in the checkbook as of June 30, 2024, was \$1,002.14. Deposits – \$15,402.71, Expenditures – None, and Transfers – \$15,402.42. Total EWCRC money on deposit in the Local Government Investment Pool as of September 30, 2024, is \$1,405,993.94. The interest rate for September 2024 was 5.23%. There was discussion about Winnebago County's remaining balance of \$5,000 for its 2023-member county contribution. Kelly Lepple reported that she was in contact with Ethan Hollenberger from Winnebago County and the remaining \$5,000 will be paid by the end of November. Motion by Caine/Mulder to approve the Financial Report as read. Motion carried.

**Report of WisDOT Railroads and Harbors:** Ben Mohlke reported that the 2024 WisDOT Annual Freight Railroad Conference was held on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, at the Marriott Conference Center located in Middleton, Wisconsin. Ben Mohlke reported on the topics that were discussed at the Freight Railroad Conference and the presenters. Ben Mohlke stated that he will be posting the Conference presentations online on the WisDOT website for anyone wishing to view them.

Ben Mohlke gave a brief history of the Freight Advisory Committee. WisDOT established the Freight Advisory Committee to help inform the department on issues that impact freight mobility and to provide a voice for the freight sector on the development of freight-related policies, processes and projects. The Freight Advisory Committee includes representatives from sectors including industry, agriculture, logistics, warehousing, economic development and transportation.

**Merrimack Bridge:** Ken Lucht and Ben Mohlke reported the following: In 2014, the Merrimack Bridge was rated at 268,000-lb. carload capacity. Due to the deterioration of the bridge and the resulting weight limitations and speed restrictions, WisDOT and WSOR completed multiple studies to determine restoration options for the bridge in 2016. WisDOT and WSOR subsequently determined they would proceed with rehabilitation of the bridge in three phases. Phase I of the Merrimack Bridge Rehabilitation and Span Replacement Project was completed in 2018 and included emergency repairs on one span to improve immediate structural requirements and design engineering for Phase II rehabilitation work. Phase II was completed in May of 2021 and included replacement of the steel components of nine of the bridge spans. Phase III of the project was selected in 2020 for a U.S. DOT Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grant in the amount of \$6,750,000. Final design was completed in the summer of 2022. In November of 2022, Michels Construction was awarded the project as lowest bidder. In 2023, Phase III construction began with replacing numerous spans. In 2024, more spans were replaced with substructure rehabilitation. In the first quarter of 2025, the Bridge work will be completed.

**Freight Rail Preservation Program:** Ken Lucht asked for an update on the proposed revisions of the Freight Rail Preservation Program Grant Application Instructions. Ben Mohlke stated that they are still reviewing the proposed revisions of the Freight Rail Preservation Program Grant Application Instructions.

**Report of WSOR:** Ken Lucht reported the following: In 2024, WSOR installed approximately 42,000 ties throughout its different subdivisions, replaced approximately 17 at grade crossings, and completed numerous bridge projects. WSOR is working with the City of Lodi in Columbia County on the Glenview Park Underpass which will allow pedestrian and stormwater access through the railroad right-of-way. WSOR built a new 15,000 square foot locomotive shop in Janesville. WSOR is working with the City of Oshkosh to petition the Office of Commissioner of Railroads to create a new crossing over Compass Way in the Industrial Park. In 2025, Lycon will be starting construction of a new redi mix concrete plant. In order for Lycon to receive rail services, a new spur and crossing would need to be installed on Compass Way. Ken Lucht stated that he recently attended the Town of Plymouth board meeting regarding the permanent closure of Short Cut Road. The Board unanimously approved the closure and by the end of March 2025, that entire crossing will be closed to all traffic. WSOR was presented with a President's Safety Award from the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association for going 250,000-man hours without a single injury. Ken Lucht will reach out to Charter Steel to set up a date and time for the Consortium to come and tour the facility.

**Date, time, and place of next meeting (January 8, 2025, or March 12, 2025):** The next regular EWCRC meeting will be held on January 8, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. Dodge County will host the meeting, to be held at the Dodge County Administration Building, located in Juneau, Wisconsin.

Motion by Schleif/Caine to adjourn. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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John Zorn, Secretary

**Disclaimer:** These are draft minutes. These draft minutes may be approved, amended, or corrected at the next meeting of the East Wisconsin Counties Railroad Consortium.

**EAST WISCONSIN COUNTIES RAILROAD CONSORTIUM  
FUNDS ON DEPOSIT AS OF FEBRUARY 28, 2025**

**PREPARED FOR THE MARCH 12, 2025, EWCRC MEETING  
US BANK**

**CHECKING ACCOUNT**

Date/Activity	Total Amount Of Income/ Expenditures/ Transfers	Balance
Balance as of October 31, 2024.....	.....	\$ 1,002.43

**DEPOSITS:**

**December 2, 2024** – Winnebago County Remaining Unpaid 2023 Member Contribution. \$ 5,000.00 (deposit)

**January 31, 2025** – WSOR 2025 1st Quarter Rent \$ 5,201.21 (deposit)

\*\*Interest accrued for November 2024 (\$0.07), December 2024 (\$0.07), January 2025 (\$0.07), February 2025 (\$0.06) \$ 0.27 (Interest)

**TOTAL DEPOSITS.....** \$ **10,201.48**

**EXPENDITURES:**

None.

**TOTAL EXPENDITURES .....** \$ **0.00**

**TRANSFERS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
INVESTMENT POOL:**

**December 2, 2024** – Winnebago County Remaining Unpaid 2023 Member Contribution. \$ 5,201.21 (EFT)

**January 31, 2025** – WSOR 2025 1st Quarter Rent \$ 5,000.00 (EFT)

**TOTAL TRANSFERS.....** \$ **10,201.21**

**February 28, 2025 – BALANCE IN CHECKBOOK** \$ **1,002.70**  
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<b>TOTAL EWCRC MONEY ON DEPOSIT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT POOL (as of January 31, 2025)</b>	<b>\$1,443,522.95</b> (Interest Rate for January 2025 is 4.39%)
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June 2025

Letter to U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Leadership office Addresses

Dear Chair Cruz and Ranking Member Cantwell:

Letter to U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Leadership Office Addresses

Dear Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chair Webster, and Ranking Member Titus:

As Congress pursues legislation investing in infrastructure, fostering continued economic development, and facilitating a more resilient transportation network, freight railroads are a key part of the solution. Every ton of freight moved by rail strengthens the economy, supports jobs, and saves taxpayers money.

Freight railroads invest private capital into maintaining and upgrading their infrastructure and technology across 135,000 track miles nationwide while other modes require taxpayer assistance. Freight railroads have spent more than \$830 billion on locomotives, freight cars, tracks, bridges, tunnels, and other equipment and technology since 1980. This equates to 39 cents of every dollar earned.

Private investment correlates directly with safety. The rail employee injury rate in 2023 was at an all-time low, and the train accident and hazmat accident rates are down 30% and 75%, respectively, since 2000.

Moreover, because a train can carry the load of several hundred trucks, railroads ease burdens on the nation's highways and bridges while also reducing congestion and emitting 75% fewer greenhouse gas emissions per ton-mile. As the greenest way to move freight over land, railroads account for approximately 40% of U.S. intercity freight while emitting less than 2% of transportation-related emissions.

In short, freight railroads are essential to the nation with freight demand expected to rise 50% by 2050. As such, the undersigned individuals and organizations believe any infrastructure package must enable continued, robust private-sector investment in freight rail.

When considering infrastructure legislation, Congress should include the following policies:

- **Prioritize Safety and Performance Through Innovation.** Congress should ensure any measure dealing with railroad operations addresses a specific need and is supported by sound data. New measures for future implementation by USDOT should be performance-based and avoid prescriptive operational requirements. Outdated rules and practices limit innovation and competitiveness, standing in direct conflict with the stated goals of new leaders in Washington.
- **Improve Safety Partnership Opportunities.** Increasing funding for highway-rail grade crossing projects – including through the Section 130 program and the Grade Crossing Elimination program – and discretionary grant programs would enable the public sector to improve highway safety along railroad crossings. Other programs such as INFRA, MEGA, and CRISI, are also important for successful PPPs. Moneys aimed towards the freight rail sector should enable government to partner with freight railroads to advance projects of mutual interest. Congress should increase funding for these activities.

- **Restore the Highway Trust Fund and Modal Equity.** Railroads both compete with trucking companies over freight and count them among their biggest customers. Highway congestion and deficient infrastructure hurt the supply chain. Less efficient modes of transportation receive federal subsidies in the form of artificially low fuel taxes as well as incentives to automate their operations to improve network fluidity and safety. To ensure a robust and solvent Highway Trust Fund (HTF), Congress should base HTF funding on a “user pays” principle. When general fund monies are used to pay for roads and bridges, and when heavy trucks are allowed to operate without paying the full cost of their impact, highways are incentivized for freight movement. Over time, Congress should implement a system to ensure commercial vehicles pay their full infrastructure cost, including through a mileage structure that incorporates vehicle weight.
- **Reject Economic Re-Regulation.** Balanced economic regulation that favors market principles has allowed freight railroads to continue record investment in the rail network. Congress should avoid changes to the U.S. Surface Transportation Board as part of any infrastructure bill, particularly if it included measures that would threaten rail investment and undermine the ability of railroads to help the nation meet other policy goals.
- **Support Competitive Grant Programs.** Lawmakers should pursue funding for grant programs that enable the public sector, including state and local governments, to partner with freight and passenger railroads and other modes to improve the overall fluidity of the supply chain.

Thank you for your leadership and for your continued attention to the role freight railroads play in supporting robust and sustainable economies in communities across America.

Sincerely,

CC: Members of the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

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I authorize GoRail to include my name and organization on this group letter, which will be delivered to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation in advance of its mark-up of an infrastructure bill.

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Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Organization

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date