

Analysis of Rail Service in Northern British Columbia

Study Summary

Introduction

The Resource Municipalities Coalition (RMC) has completed an analysis of the freight rail network and rail service in Northern British Columbia. Northern BC has abundant natural resources and many opportunities for economic development, and the rail network is a necessary economic enabler. It includes over 3,000 kilometres of track, connecting to dozens of communities, hundreds of businesses, and serves as a connection to world markets through the Port of Prince Rupert.

Methodology & Findings

The study included a review of existing rail network conditions and operations, an extensive stakeholder engagement program which resulted in the creation of an inventory of planning, operating and infrastructure initiatives designed to further economic development in the region. Rail-dependent opportunities were identified in a range of market sectors including Agriculture, Forestry, Mining, and Energy.

Given the breadth of industry consultation and the resulting feedback, a detailed multiple account evaluation (MAE) was used to assess initiatives. Initiatives were evaluated based upon their estimated capital and operating costs, potential to improve rail service and generate trade volumes, benefits to stakeholders, and ease of implementation.

Strategic Plan

The study organizes the ten recommended improvement ideas into a strategic plan. The ideas are organized into three key themes, Planning and Advocacy, Terminals, and Operations, and Shortline and Network Upgrades, based on the relationship between each idea. It also provides an order in which the ideas should be implemented, and rationale and relationships between the different ideas within each theme.



An extensive stakeholder engagement program was conducted for the project with Producers/Shippers, Municipalities, First Nations, and Canadian National Railway.

Engagement was conducted through an online questionnaire and one-on-one follow up interviews. Input was received from over 170 respondents, 30 of which were interviewed. This provided essential insight into current conditions and potential improvement ideas for freight rail improvements in Northern BC.

Figure 1: Strategic Plan

Strategic Plan – Improvements by Theme



Planning & Advocacy

- Rail Planning & Advocacy Entity
- Crew Incentives & Partnerships
- Railway Safety Improvement Program (RSIP) Education
- Further Study of At-Grade Crossings & Prioritization

Terminals & Operations

- Customer Self Switching
- Railcar Consolidation
- Shipper Hook & Haul Infrastructure / Storage
- Third Party Value Add Facility

Shortline & Network Upgrades

- Shortline Railway
- Track Upgrade to 286k Gross Weight Capacity