

# Commentary

## Mitigation is best solution to impasse

By Kevin V. Schieffer

In a Jan. 13 editorial, the Post-Bulletin urged the Minnesota delegation "act against DM&E" by forcing all coal traffic onto a rail line in Iowa. It is impossible to implement such a plan for legal, ethical, economic and other reasons.

This response is intended to correct factual errors in the P-B editorial, address the substance of its suggestions, and offer an alternative approach.

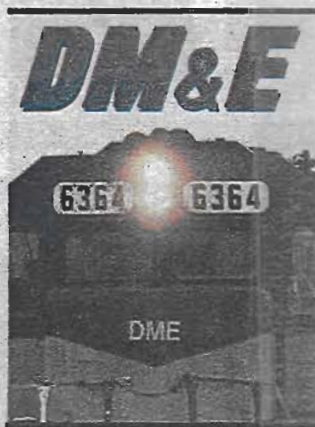
The P-B's account of sneaking in rail financing legislation through "craftiness" is colorful, but wrong. It didn't happen "during a conference committee" at the end of the highway bill consideration. It was adopted by the Senate on May 17, 2005, and was public information for more than two months before the "conference committee" vote. It was openly lobbied by the Short Line and Regional Railroad Association.

The P-B also got it wrong in saying that private financing efforts for the project have "failed."

There is no basis in fact to make such a claim.



Schieffer



Finally, the P-B continues to feed the fiction that Rochester will have "37 coal trains a day." To the contrary, it is clear that volumes will diminish as traffic moves off our system before reaching Rochester. There is one interchange point east of Rochester, compared to dozens that exit the mainline to the west of Rochester.

A great irony of this case is that Rochester will see less traffic than anywhere else, but is the only city on the DM&E line that today uses our railroad to deliver coal (much of which is used by the Mayo Clinic). A more realistic estimate for Rochester is three to 10 trains per day,

which we publicly estimated in our environmental impact statement filings more than five years ago. Whatever traffic does materialize, its impacts have been hyped out

of proportion. The best evidence of that comes from Mayo itself. After years of claiming how devastating having trains next to a hospital would be, in 1998 Mayo built a new health care facility, including a hospital, immediately adjacent to a railroad in Lake City that has more than 40 trains per day.

Mayo has been consistent in refusing to discuss mitigation, but instead demands zero traffic. The P-B's latest proposal reflects that. Agreeing to "no coal through Rochester" would mean revising starting the environmental and regulatory process all over again. It would also require us to ignore our common carrier obligations.

The P-B's demands upon the delegation are simply another version of Mayo's earlier rural bypass designed to push their perceived problem into someone else's backyard. The newspaper offers its proposal as "the ultimate bypass," unaware of the self-centered weakness of the foundation upon which such a proposition is based. Whether the problems are real or imagined, it is unreasonable to expect the congressional delegation to dump them on your neighbors.

The editorial also suggests that "not rebuilding the rail

line between Owatonna and Winona would save the DM&E a lot of money." The whole point of this project is to rebuild the line. We are not going to abandon our line in eastern Minnesota to satisfy Mayo. Other Minnesotans want better rail service. It opens up new opportunities for them today — just as Rochester saw 150 years ago when it lobbied so hard to get our railroad to come through town, and just as the Mayo Clinic saw when it built next to our line in passenger days.

Minnesota communities, farmers, shippers, workers, economic development groups and others see benefit and opportunity in our project — both east and west of Rochester. The USDA cited a 10-cent to 20-cent-per-bushel impact this project could have for grain producers in Minnesota. Minnesota Farm Bureau, Minnesota Farmers Union, Minnesota Agri-Growth Council, Minnesota Grain and Feed Association, Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, Southern Grainbelt Shippers Association and virtually all of the major agriculture groups in Minnesota support this project.

Economic development organizations in most of the communities we serve are eager for construction to begin. We cannot shortchange them to please opponents. They are constituents, too.

So are energy consumers in Minnesota, who stand to gain a great deal from this project. It was ironic that on the same day as the P-B editorial the paper reported yet another rate increase for Rochester Public Utilities.

We want to address legitimate mitigation issues and work out some type of agreement with Rochester on how to best handle the relatively small amount of traffic the city will experience as a result of our project. But we have to do it conscious of our friends and neighbors and legal obligations. We are very small compared to Mayo, but don't think it is reasonable to expect we should be forced to accept unreasonable demands.

Reasonable people can work things out. We hope and believe we can find solutions with reasonable dialogue.

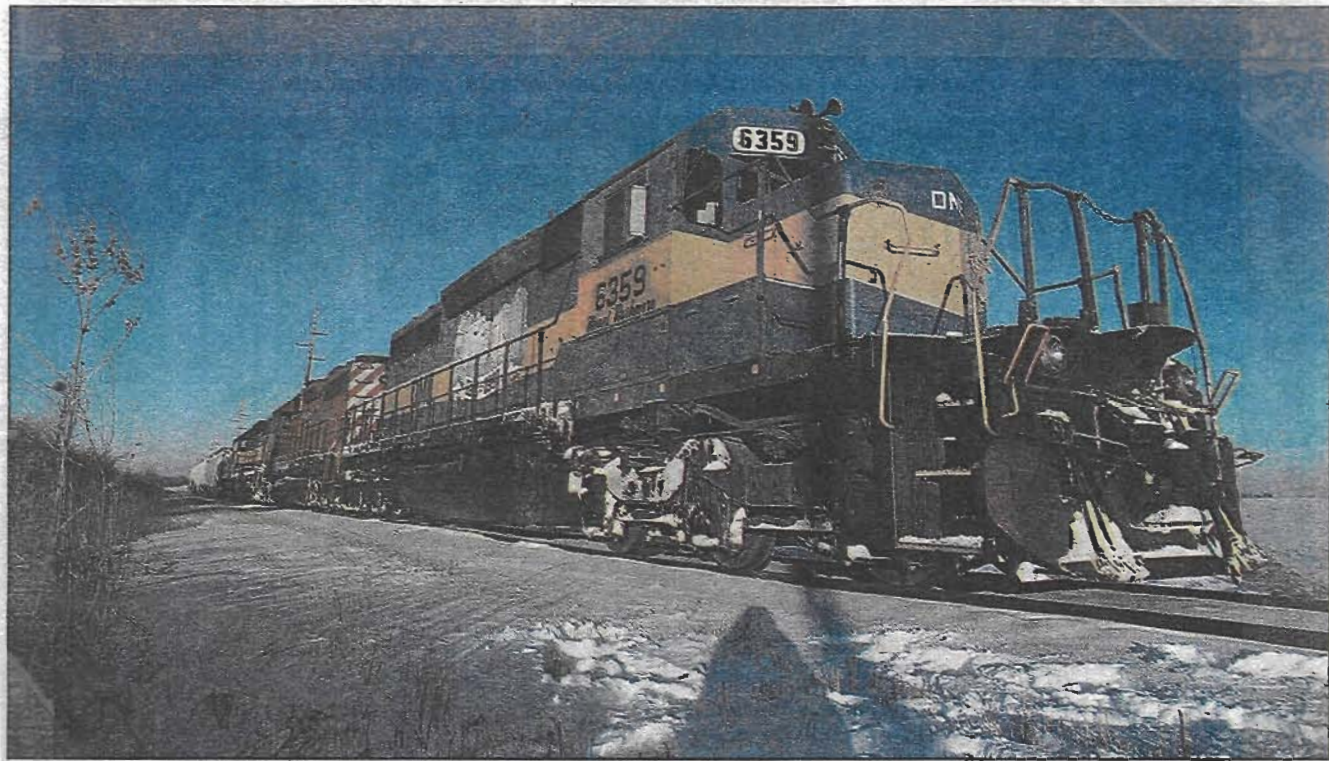
*Kevin Schieffer is president and CEO of the DM&E Railroad.*

### Letters invited

Letters should be 225 words or fewer and include the name, hometown and daytime phone number of the writer. We verify all letters. Anonymous letters will not be published.

Letters can be sent to Editorial Page, Post-Bulletin, 18 First Ave. S.E., Rochester, MN 55901. You can also send e-mail to letters@postbulletin.com.

If you have questions, call letters editor Greg Sellnow at 285-7703.



Post-Bulletin file photo

**DM&E President and CEO Kevin Schieffer disputes the projection that up to 37 coal trains a day will be running through Rochester and says three to 10 per day is a more accurate estimate.**