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Highway 8 Rail Line Corridor Committee Proceedings Reported by Jack Miller

Rhineland, April 29, 2022: A consensus of opinion formed at the Packaging Company or America (PCA) during the first and formative meeting of the Highway 8 Rail Line Corridor Committee (RLCC). The meeting was held at the PCA training facility at the north end of their manufacturing and shipping complex on the Wisconsin River in Tomahawk. The consensus and common sense concurred that shipping by rail is cheaper, more efficient and more environmentally friendly than over the road (OTR) transport by truck. One truck, one engine, one driver versus 100 railcars, each carrying the volume and weight of three trucks, one engine, and one driver.

The purpose of forming the Highway 8 RLCC, as well as other Wisconsin RLCCs is to transform shipping and interstate commerce from its current increasingly more costly, inefficient and unsustainable situation, into a more reasonably priced, efficient and sustainable solution for the long term. The Highway 8 RLCC proposes that a transformed rail system in Wisconsin get tractors and trailers off the public roads saving countless millions of dollars in fuel and road repair costs and allow for safer public transportation. A reinvigorated rail network will also bring economic vitality to the far reaches of rural Wisconsin.

As one member put it, “We make things here.” We can and will make more things here if we can rely on raw materials from distant suppliers and transport of finished goods nationally and internationally. For the long term, for generations to come, the solution will be rail, and the nascent RLCCs mean to bring about their vision of what we wish to call Midwest Intermodal Transport. We can use trains for their dependability, durability, efficiency and sustainability. Trucks will always be indispensable for their ability to go where trains do not or cannot, just as trains cannot transport goods internationally, but must rely on international ocean transport.

For local industry, rail access can be as important as broadband for Internet access. Distribution centers, hardwired for broadband and hard-railed for transport, can be established where the industry is or where it is going to be, rather than limited only to large urban areas.

We need to get started now, when funds are coming available as a result of the passing of the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill](#) or Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which was signed, into law by President Biden on November 15, 2021. It takes a lot of money to activate an out of service railroad line. The 53 miles from Rhineland to Goodman could cost \$53 million to put back in service. It might take us a year just to request those funds and three to five years to make the investment.

That’s why we must get started now, and that’s also why we must start RLCCs for all out-of-service rail lines in Wisconsin. The Highway 8 Corridor is a main transportation artery that must be established in order to “bypass Chicago,” but in order to reinvigorate commerce in the most distant rural communities, towns like White Pine, Michigan, Butternut, Glidden, Mellen and Ashland Wisconsin must be connected to the statewide and nationwide network of rail.

Our intent is to bring to life what once we had when railroads would take our products and ourselves from a depot within walking distance of our homes to anywhere on the continent. That is Midwest Intermodal Transport, and that will transform life in rural Wisconsin and rural America.

