

**Written Testimony of Steve Millsap**

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**Before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee**

**For a Hearing on “Progress on Implementing the American**

**Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009”**

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## Introduction

Chairman Oberstar, Ranking Member Mica and distinguished Members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to discuss the progress being made on the Burlington Bridge span replacement project, which is being funded in significant part through Congressional appropriations included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). My name is Steve Millsap and I am Assistant Vice President for Structures with BNSF Railway Company. In this capacity, I have responsibility for BNSF's bridges, tunnels, snow sheds, other structural assets and facilities.

You are probably somewhat familiar with BNSF. It operates one of the largest freight rail systems in North America with approximately 32,000 route miles in 28 states and two Canadian Provinces. BNSF is the leading intermodal rail carrier, handling millions of shipments every year that could go by truck but are shipped on our railroad. We serve all major ports on the West Coast and Gulf of Mexico, with key routes between Southern California and Chicago, and the Pacific Northwest and Chicago. BNSF is also the largest grain hauling railroad in the country and has major coal and industrial products franchises as well. BNSF employs close to 40,000 men and women around the country who are dedicated to consistently meeting our many customers' expectations.

## The Burlington Bridge

The Burlington Bridge was originally built in 1868 by the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad (CB&Q), a BNSF predecessor road, spanning the Mississippi River

between Burlington, Iowa and Gulf Port, Illinois. At the time of construction it was a celebrated engineering marvel, stretching over two thousand feet and the first all metal structure to cross the river. It was built by post-Civil War labor forces of stone masonry piers and wrought iron spans and began as a single track line but was later expanded to accommodate a second track. Upon opening, the bridge immediately played an important role carrying the many people and goods which propelled the young nation's western expansion into the twentieth century.

BNSF's Burlington Bridge continues to be a critically important infrastructure component along the freight and passenger rail corridor between Chicago and Denver and on to California. It carries an average of 34 freight trains per day with peak days of 40 trains, equating to 110 million gross tons of freight in 2009 including electricity-producing coal, consumer goods, industrial products and agricultural commodities. It also handles two daily Amtrak California Zephyr intercity passenger trains. Finally, the bridge is included on the U.S. Military's Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET), recognizing it as critical infrastructure for the movement of important military equipment in times of defense emergencies.

The bridge sits at the intersection of two different modes of transportation with marine traffic moving up and down the Mississippi River. This is the reason for the bridge's 362-foot movable swing span which opens an average of 300 times per month to allow barges and large pleasure crafts to pass through. The bridge is manned twenty-four hours a day by BNSF bridge tenders who open it upon water vessel demand.

The swing span, however, provides only 147 feet of horizontal clearance for these vessels, requiring wide barges to break tow to move through the bridge and reassemble

on the other side. The narrow opening also presents navigation challenges for most other commercial traffic, which must slow down if going downstream and utilize assist tugs during periods of high water. This adds great delay and risk to both the railroad and commercial water traffic and unfortunately accounts for the bridge being struck by marine vessels on a regular basis. In fact, based on information gathered by the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and American Waterway Operators (AWO), the Burlington Bridge is the third most struck bridge in the nation.<sup>1</sup> On August 6, 1991 the USCG declared the bridge a hazard to navigation and an “Order to Alter” was issued by the Coast Guard Commandant. Thereafter BNSF began planning for the improvement of the bridge to provide channel clearances for the reasonable needs of navigation under the provisions of the Truman-Hobbs Act of 1940.

#### The Burlington Bridge Span Replacement Project and the ARRA

The Truman-Hobbs Act provides the authority and procedures for the alteration and removal of bridges which are found to unreasonably obstruct the navigable waters of the United States. The most relevant part of the Act for purposes of today’s hearing is that it requires the federal government, in this case the Coast Guard, to share with owners the cost of altering such bridges. The Coast Guard’s share of funding for the Burlington Bridge span replacement was ultimately determined to be approximately \$75.2 million and would normally have come through the regular Congressional appropriations process.

However, despite the fact that the Burlington Bridge order to alter was issued in 1991, it was not until passage of the ARRA in February 2009 that the necessary federal

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Coast Guard-AWO Bridge Allision Work Group, May 2003

funding became available to move the project forward. Until that point, less than half the needed amount was made available over the course of numerous appropriations cycles.<sup>2</sup> With the federal funding commitment fully in place through the ARRA, BNSF moved forward expeditiously to award the project for construction which began in November 2009.

The Burlington Bridge span replacement project under the Truman Hobbs Act consists of replacing the swing span with a modern 356-foot vertical lift span which will increase the channel width to 300 feet (more than double the previous horizontal clearance). It will also reduce the amount of time it takes to open and close the span. The current swing span requires approximately forty minutes to complete the operation while the new vertical lift will take only twenty minutes. Once finished, the project will greatly improve navigation for waterborne traffic through the bridge and reduce railroad delays caused by either waiting for vessels to slowly navigate the narrow opening or vessels actually striking the bridge and causing a temporary bridge outage.

The total cost is currently estimated at \$83.5 million with BNSF contributing approximately \$8.3 million to the project. BNSF has also decided to move forward with a significant private investment of \$72.2 million to simultaneously replace the seven older bridge approach spans on both sides of the new vertical lift span. Weather and river levels permitting, the entire 2,004-foot bridge will be replaced by December 2011.

The opportunity for the span replacement project to move forward now has immediate positive implications beyond the future operational and safety advantages for river traffic, our railroad and overall national commerce. The project has ensured the

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<sup>2</sup> From 2001 until passage of the ARRA, \$26.3 million was made available through the traditional appropriations process.

retention of 37 well paying jobs by the primary contractor, Ames Construction, and the various foundation, electrical and steel erection subcontractors including local companies like Millard Electrical and Beamis Welding and Fabrication. In addition to employee retention, eight new jobs were created as a direct result of this project. These numbers together equate to 43.98 full time employee equivalents (FTEs) as officially reported for the third quarter of fiscal year 2010. Roughly eighty percent of the daily project crew are local Iowa and Illinois residents.

The reported job numbers do not tell the full story of the economic benefits of this project. Local vendors, such as equipment rental companies, a ready-mix concrete plant, trucking companies, and small material suppliers have all felt the positive effects of this project. The numbers also do not tell, for example, about the three steel fabricator plants that have had steady work related to this project for up to 12 months. Machinery fabricators, reinforcing steel fabricators, steel casting suppliers, and many other non-reported jobs have all been positively affected by this project.

The project is now 33 percent complete. The schedule for construction and completion of the span replacement project contemplates a new operational and functional bridge by March 2011 with substantial completion by May 2011. With this schedule and performance, the transportation and safety benefits of the Burlington Bridge project will begin to be realized only nineteen months after receiving the formal Notice to Proceed (NTP).

## Conclusion

BNSF Railway is pleased with the progress of the Burlington Bridge project and proud of its long history of investing in and successfully managing large infrastructure projects. Our railroad is currently looking at a number of additional large rail infrastructure projects across the network which will deliver significant benefits not only to BNSF but also the communities and regions through which we operate. One such project is in the backyard of our company headquarters in Fort Worth, Texas—the Tower 55 rail interlocking. Tower 55 has been called one of the busiest and most congested rail intersections in the country, with more than 100 freight and passenger trains moving through the area every day. Tackling the needed infrastructure improvements at this chokepoint would not only provide immediate near-term job creation, much like the Burlington bridge project, but also tremendous ongoing economic, environmental and safety benefits to the region and state. As at least a few of the members of this committee know, BNSF continues to explore various public-private funding options with local, state and federal officials in hopes of moving forward quickly to unlock the benefits associated with fixing Tower 55.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for inviting me to testify here today. At this point I'd be happy to answer any questions you or other Members might have.