

NORTH DAKOTA PASSENGER RAIL UPDATE

Provided by Steve Salwei, North Dakota DOT 10/14/13

Devils Lake Area Rail Grade Raising

The Devils Lake area rail grade raise is progressing, on schedule, with Phase II construction nearly complete. Because of the amount of work, this project was broken into three phases. The first one, constructed in 2012, raised the rail grade approximately 5 feet. Phase II, when complete later this fall, will have raised the grade approximately another 5 feet and replaced the bolted-jointed rail with continuous, welded rail. Phase II will place the track elevation above the natural outflow of Devils Lake plus a freeboard margin for wave action.

At this time, Devils Lake is below its natural outflow and may or may not continue to rise to (or above) that natural outflow. Therefore, considering the lack of full funding received in the TIGER grant process and the uncertainty of a continued lake rise it was decided to suspend the project after Phase II. If the lake begins to rise to a level near the natural outflow, Phase III will be reconsidered, as needed.

Oil Boom Brings Increase in Station Boardings and Alightings in Western Part of State

The other major North Dakota passenger-rail item of broad interest is that boardings are significantly up in northwestern North Dakota's oil patch. Though we don't have exact numbers, we've been told the service between Williston, ND and Glasgow, MT is among the busiest Amtrak reaches between Chicago and Seattle, which contrasts significantly with the historic perspective that this stretch was among the lowest used reaches as recently as 5 years ago.

MIPRC Note: Overall boardings and alightings at stations in North Dakota have grown 18 percent over the past five years, and 87 percent during the past 10 years! On/offers at Stanley and Williston have grown the most dramatically – Stanley's on/offers grew by 155% during the past 5 years, (between FY 2008 and FY 2013), and 251% in the last 10. On/offers at the Williston station have grown by 116% over the past 5 years, and 215% over the past 10. Williston is now the "most popular" station in North Dakota (having taken over that distinction from Minot during FY 2011).

Grand Forks and Rugby, in addition to Devils Lake, have been affected by the flooding and subsequent project to raise the rail grade.

5-Year and 10-Year Growth on Boardings and Alightings at Amtrak Stations in North Dakota

Station	10-Year Growth (FY 2003 to FY 2013)	5-Year Growth (FY 2008 to FY 2013)	Boarding and Alightings 2013	Boarding and Alightings 2008	Boarding and Alightings 2003
Devils Lake	9%	-25%	5,142	6,860	4,726
Fargo	62%	-7%	22,497	24,142	13,869
Grand Forks	49%	-15%	19,422	22,842	13,024
Minot	51%	-3%	41,615	42,801	27,493
Rugby	14%	-20%	5,637	7,048	4,940
Stanley	251%	155%	9,411	3,694	2,678
Williston	215%	116%	51,076	23,619	16,196
Total	87%	18%	154,800	131,006	82,926

Source: Amtrak (MIPRC calculations)