

Rice County Rail Evolution

The last 75 years

Nick Benson, October 28, 2024

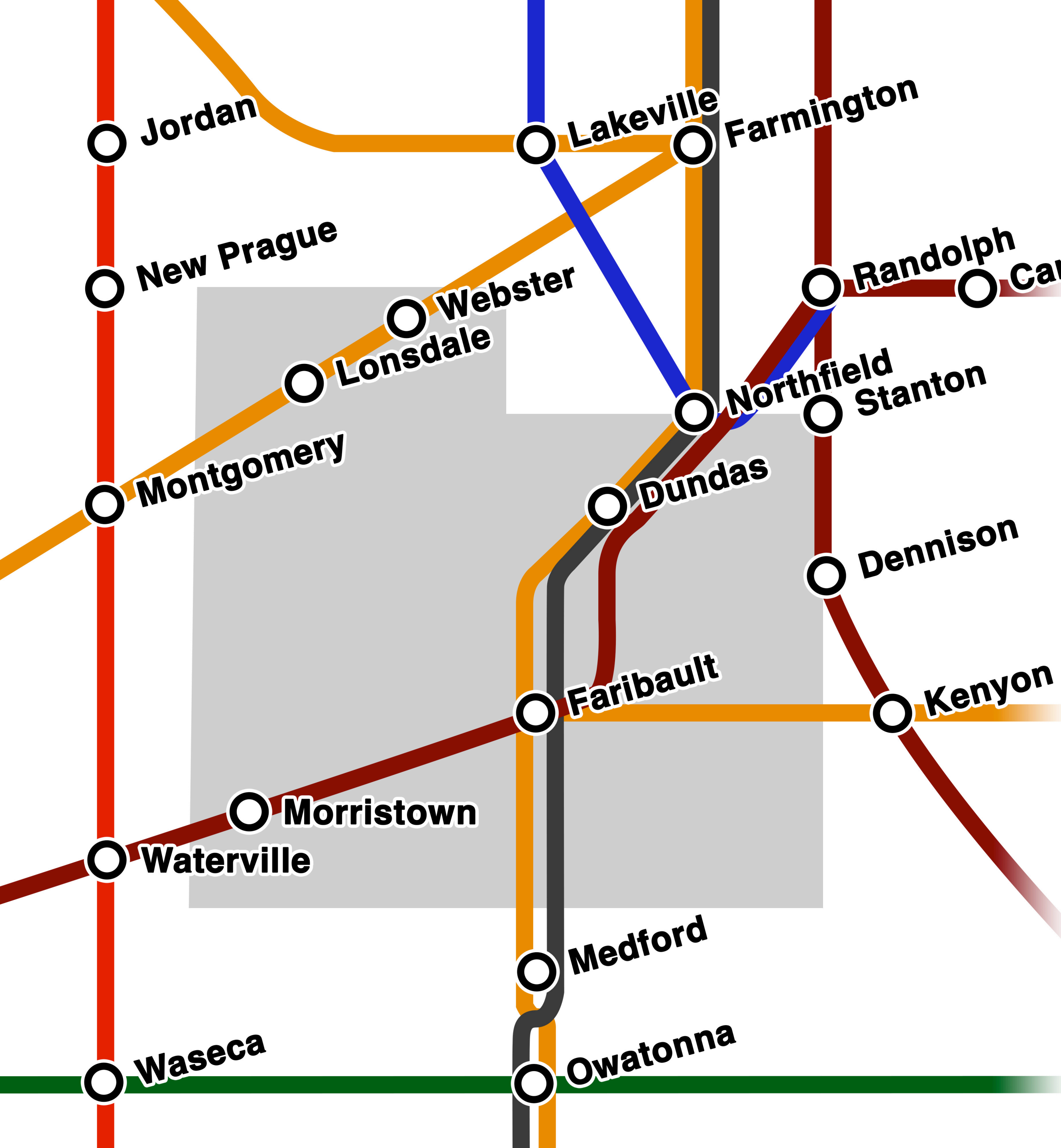
Hi, Everybody!

Nick Benson

- Graduated from Northfield High School in 2003
- Spent entirely too much time chasing trains around with a camera, especially 2005-2015
- I run JetTip, a smart flight alert service for airplane geeks
- ottergoose.net

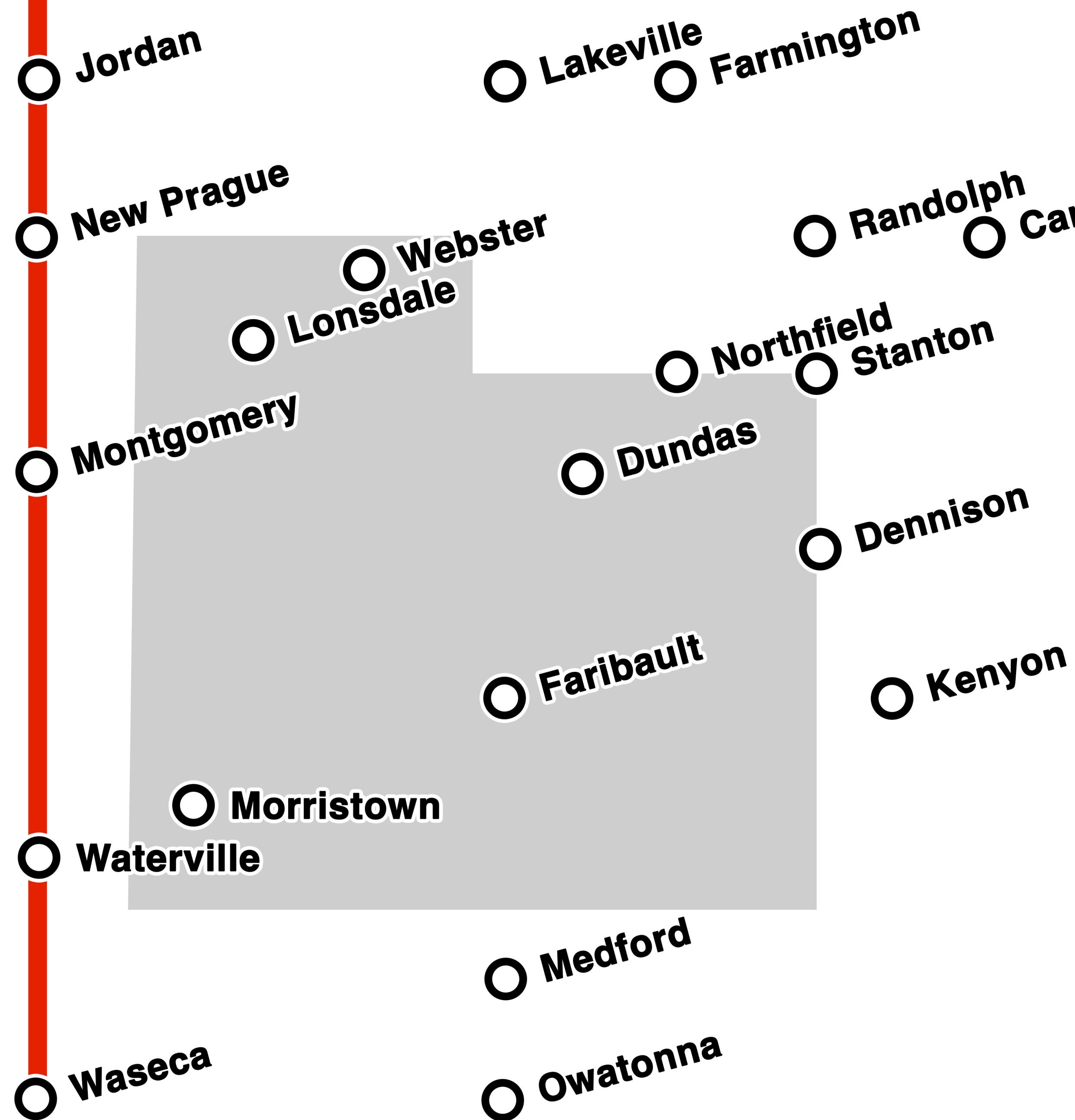


Rice County in 1950



- Dense rail network in and around Rice County, served by many different companies
- Milwaukee Road has already abandoned / removed a pair of lines in the neighborhood
 - H&D east of Farmington
 - Northfield - Cannon Falls

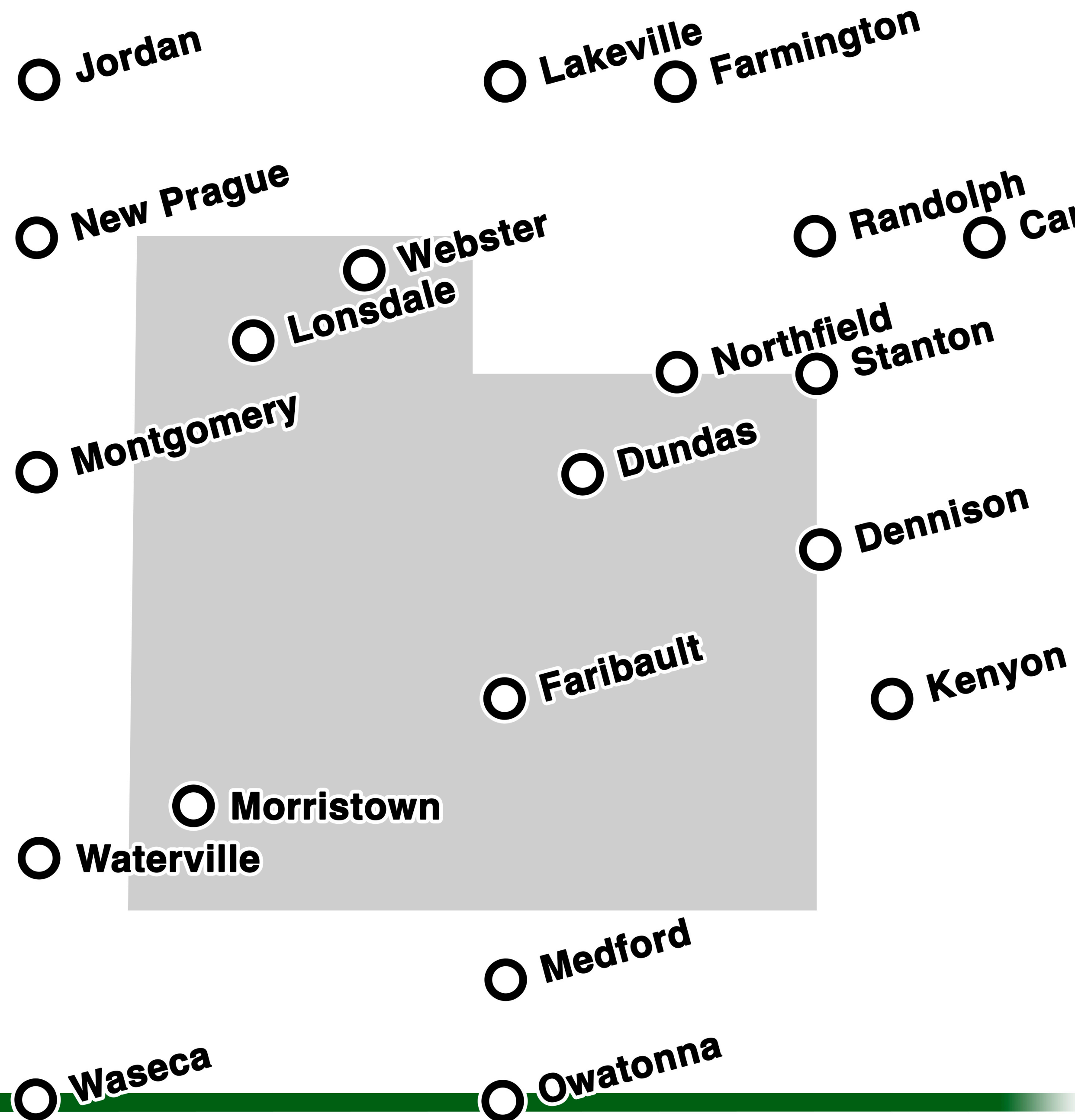
Minneapolis & St. Louis



- Based in Minneapolis
- Mainline ran north-south, from Twin Cities to Albert Lea, though much of Iowa, before hooking east to Peoria, IL

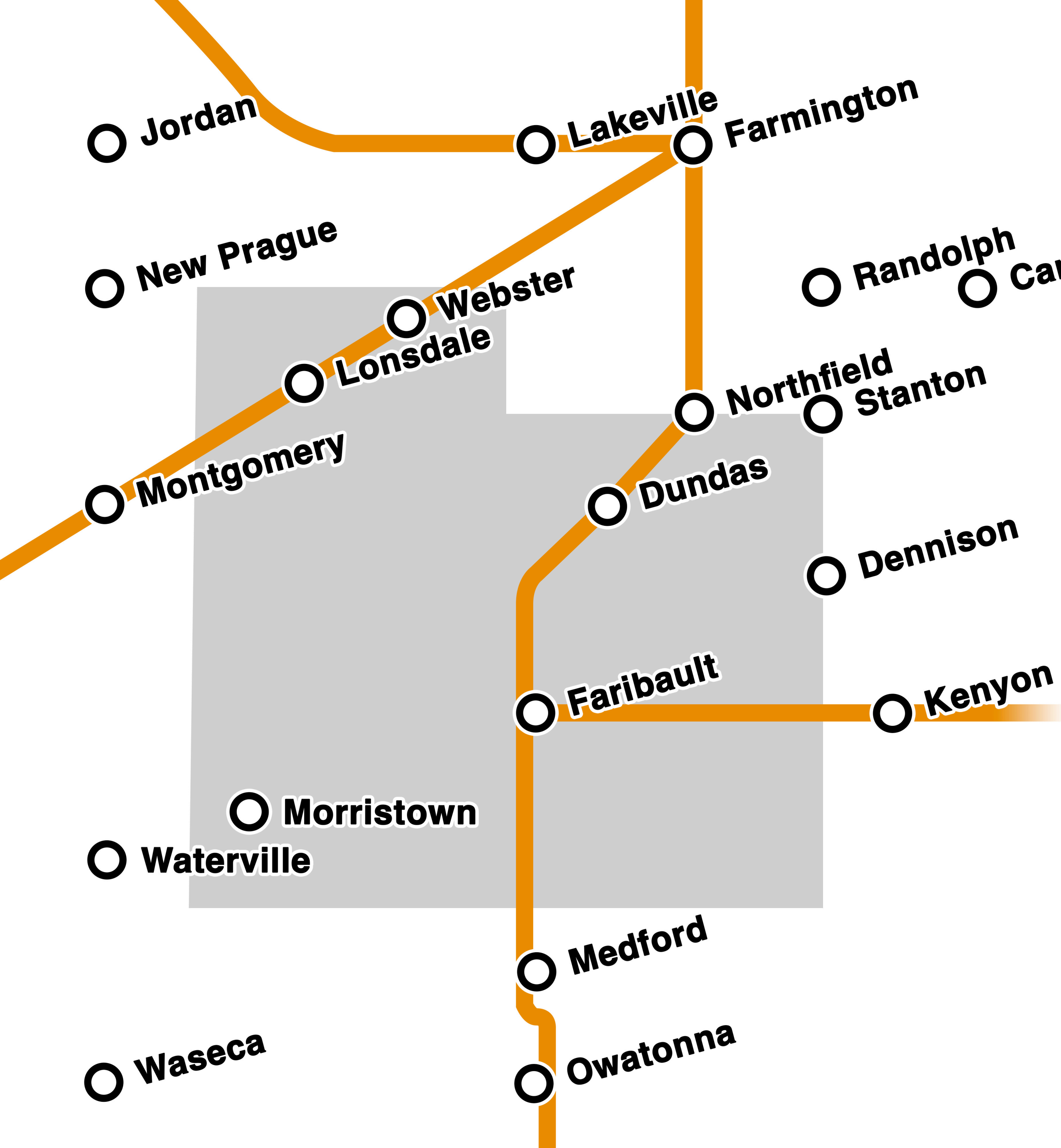


Chicago & North Western



- East-West line connecting Winona, MN to Pierre and Rapid City, SD
- Laura Ingalls Wilder lived along the line, as told in “By the Shores of Silver Lake,” and “The Long Winter”

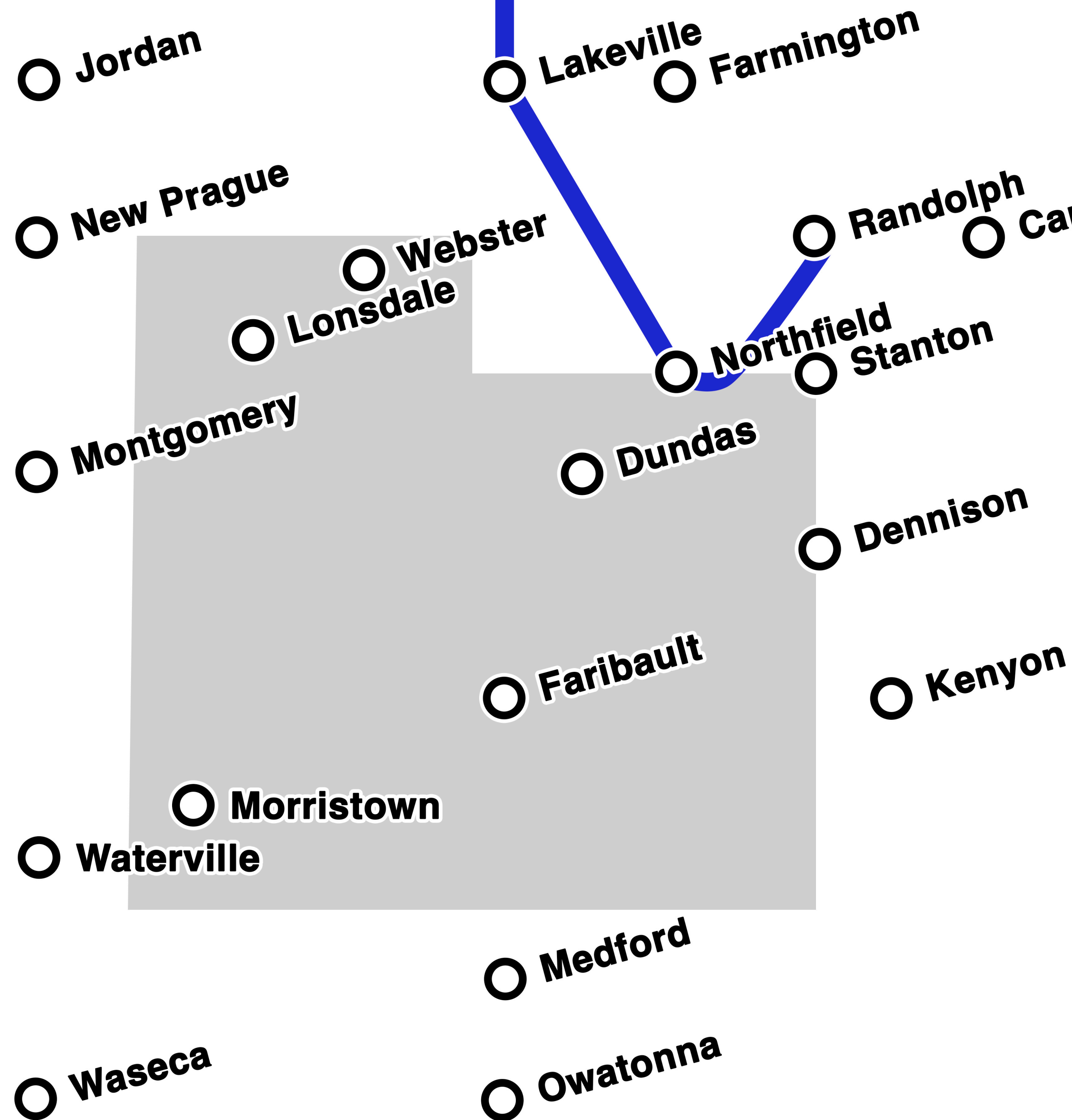




Milwaukee Road

- Rice County was in and around a dense Milwaukee Road network
- Pioneer Line (north-south through Northfield) had been an early important route, but was now secondary
- Several lines in area already abandoned by 1950 (H&D, Northfield-Cannon)



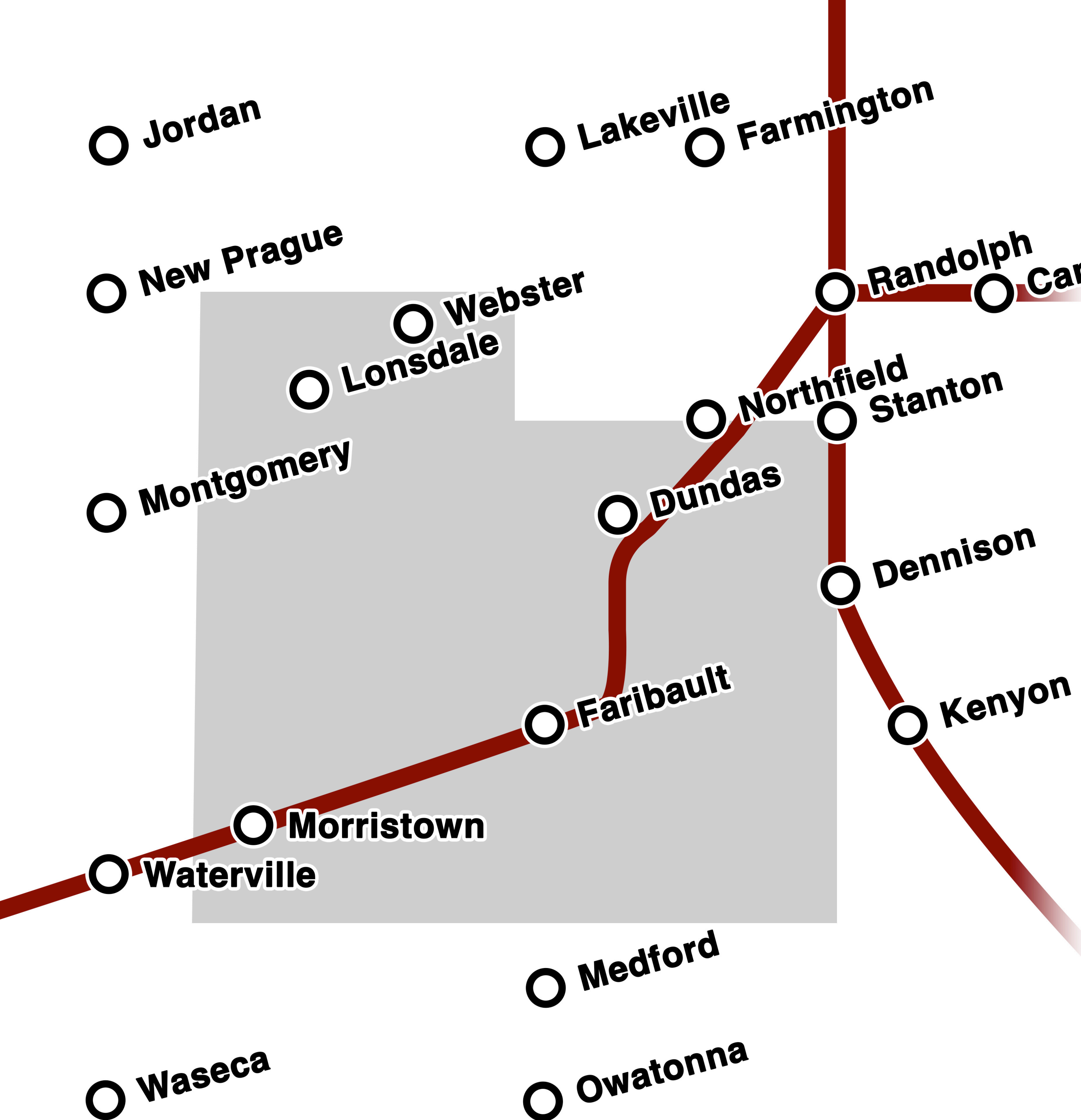


MN&S

- Minneapolis, Northfield & Southern, successor of the Dan Patch Line
- Lucrative interchange business bridging cars between different railroads around the Twin Cities

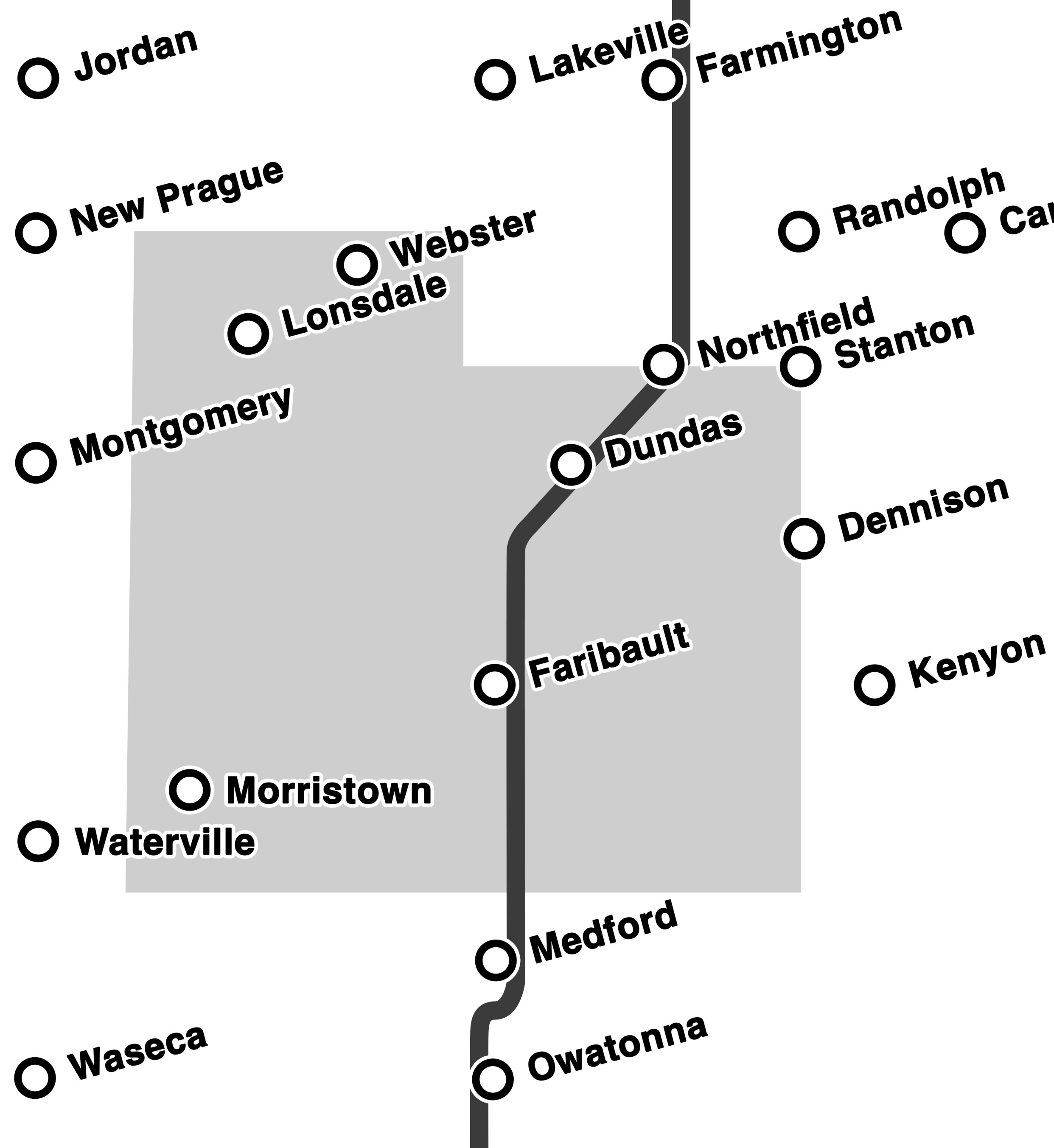


Chicago Great Western



- Mainline ran through Randolph from Minneapolis to Oelwein, IA
- East-west branchline through Rice County, connecting Red Wing and Mankato.

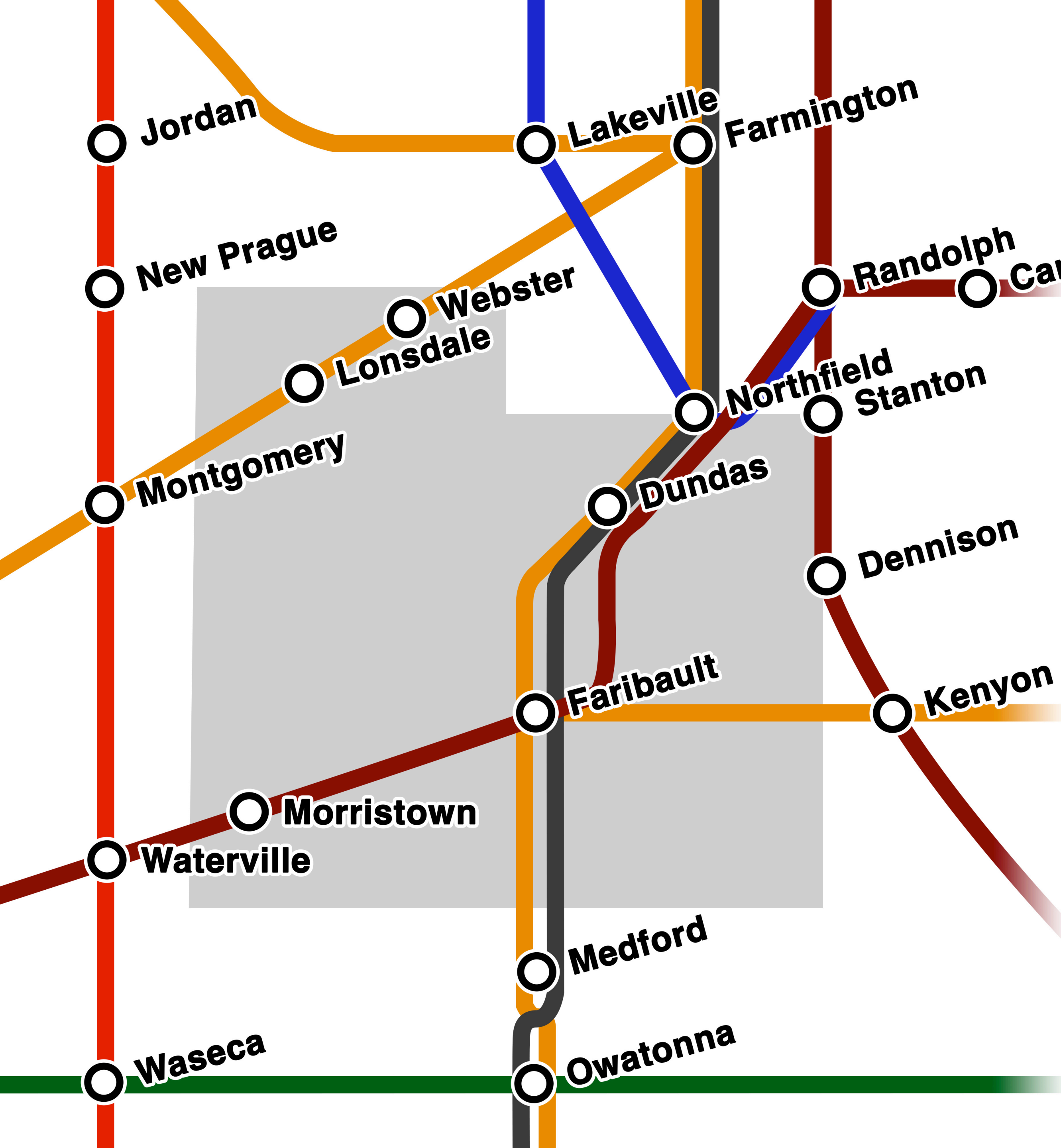




Rock Island

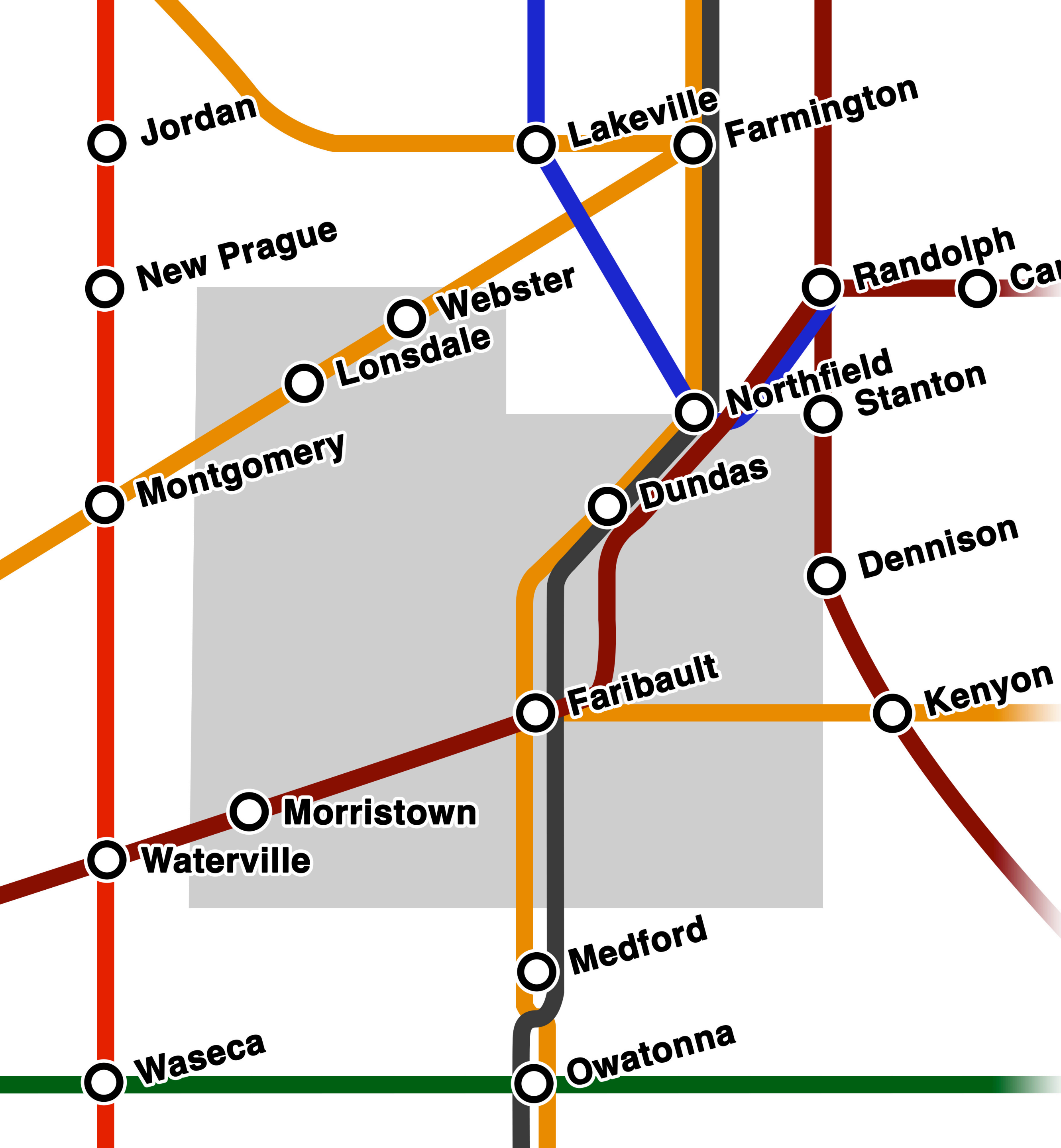
- Best high-speed, high-quality line in Rice County
- Last remaining mainline passenger service to Northfield and Faribault, *Twin Star Rocket*, *Zephyr Rocket*, and *Plainsman*





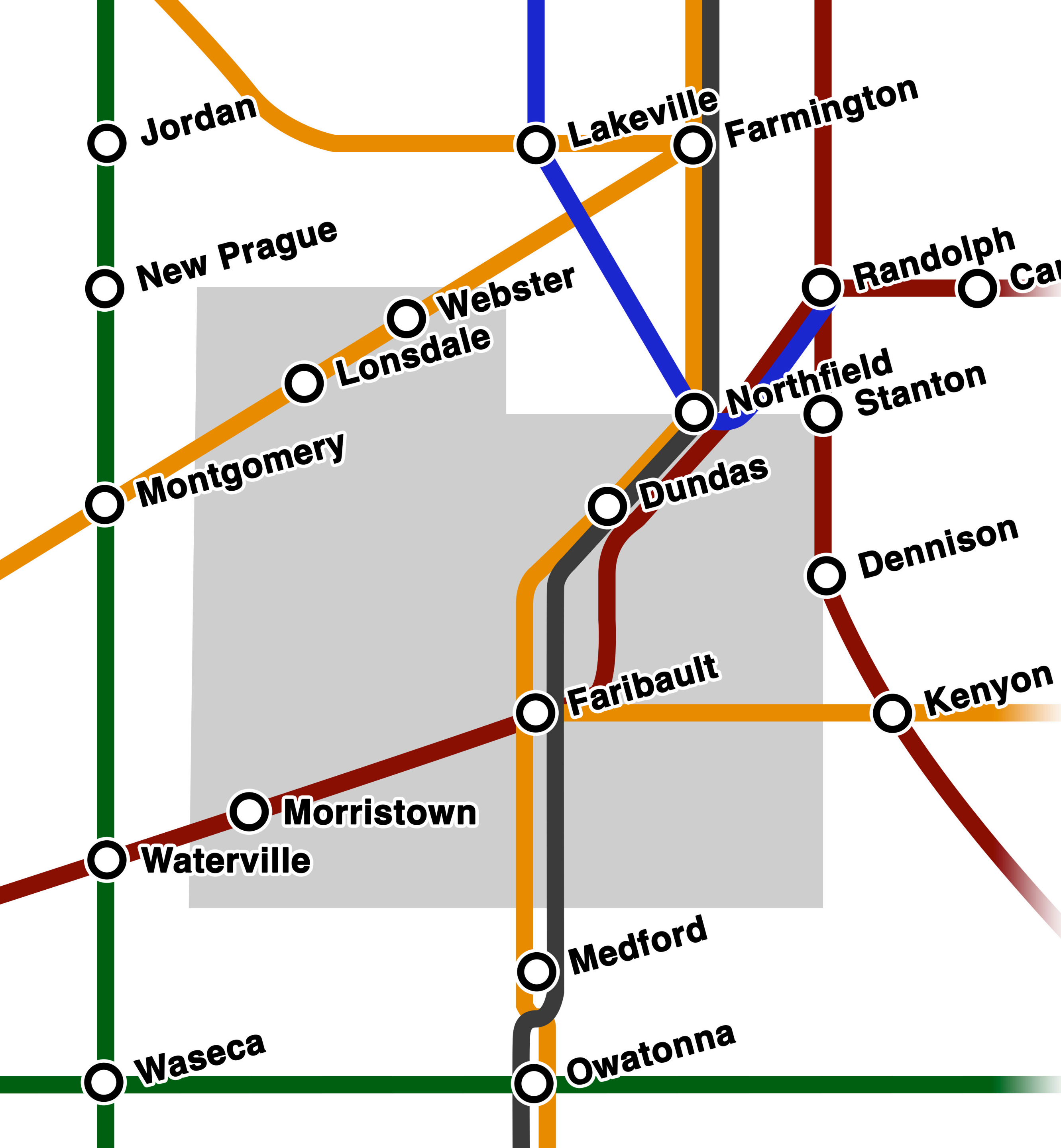
1950s

- 1950: MN&S retires last steam locomotive
- 1951: Sheffield Mill in Faribault closes
- 1951: Last CGW passenger train from Randolph to Rochester

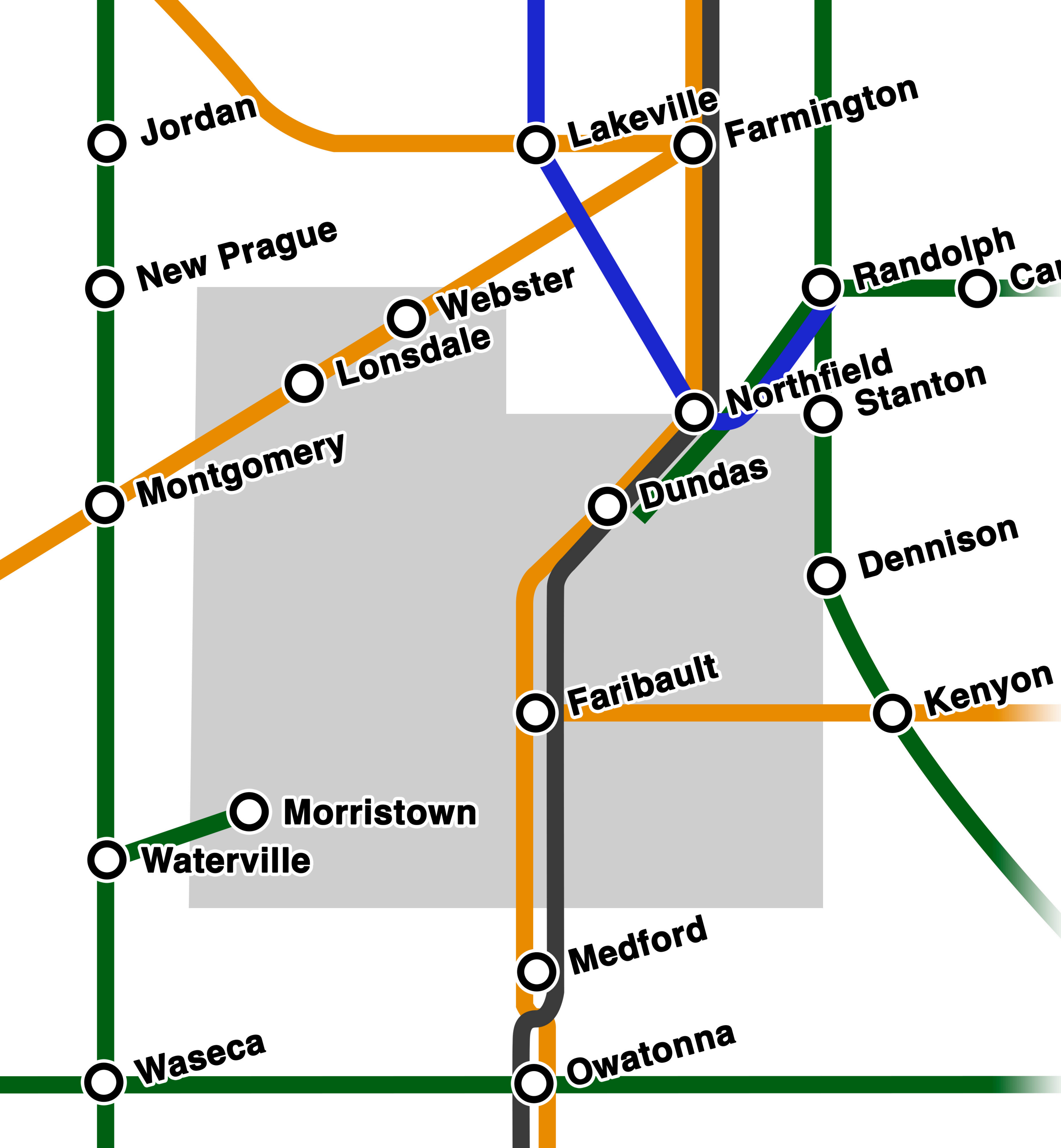


1960s

- CNW and Milwaukee consider merging with each other, or with the Rock Island

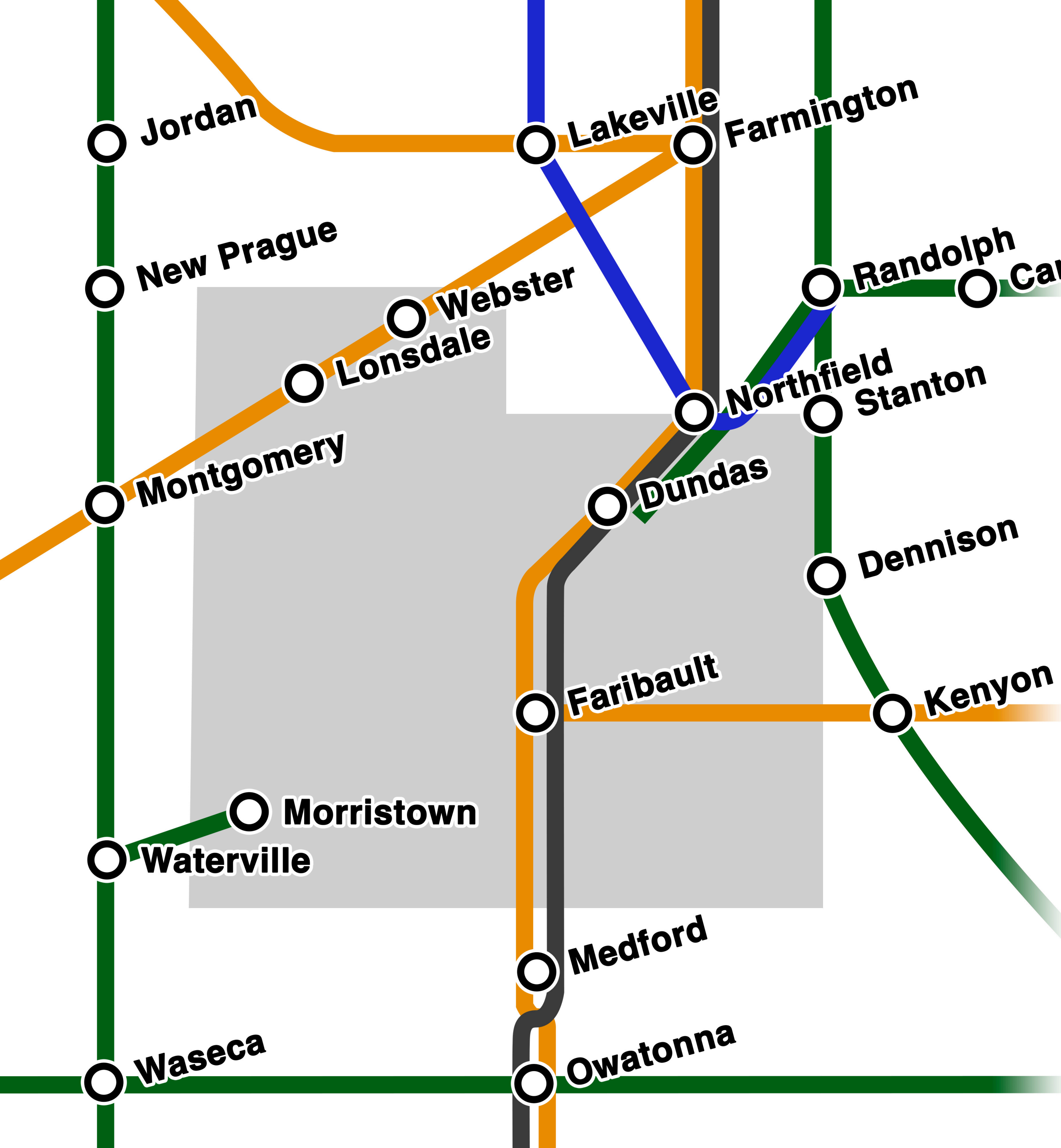


- CNW and Milwaukee consider merging with each other, or with the Rock Island
- 1960: M&StL merges into CNW



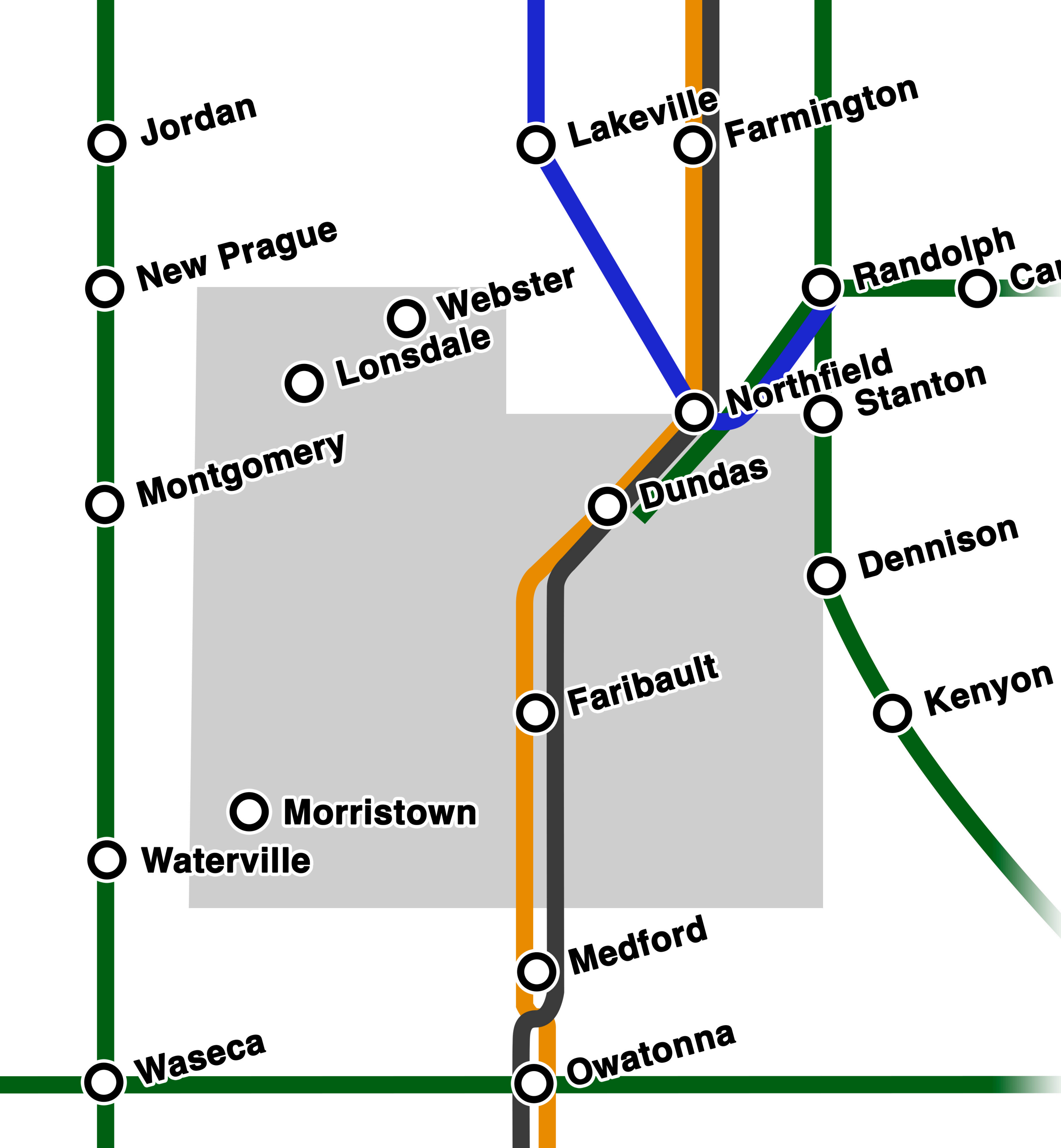
1970s

- 1973: CNW removes ex-CGW between Faribault and Morristown; Waterville towards Mankato
- 1975: CNW removes ex-CGW between Dundas and Northfield
- 1975: MILW-CNW connection built in Faribault
- 1977: Milwaukee Road bankrupt



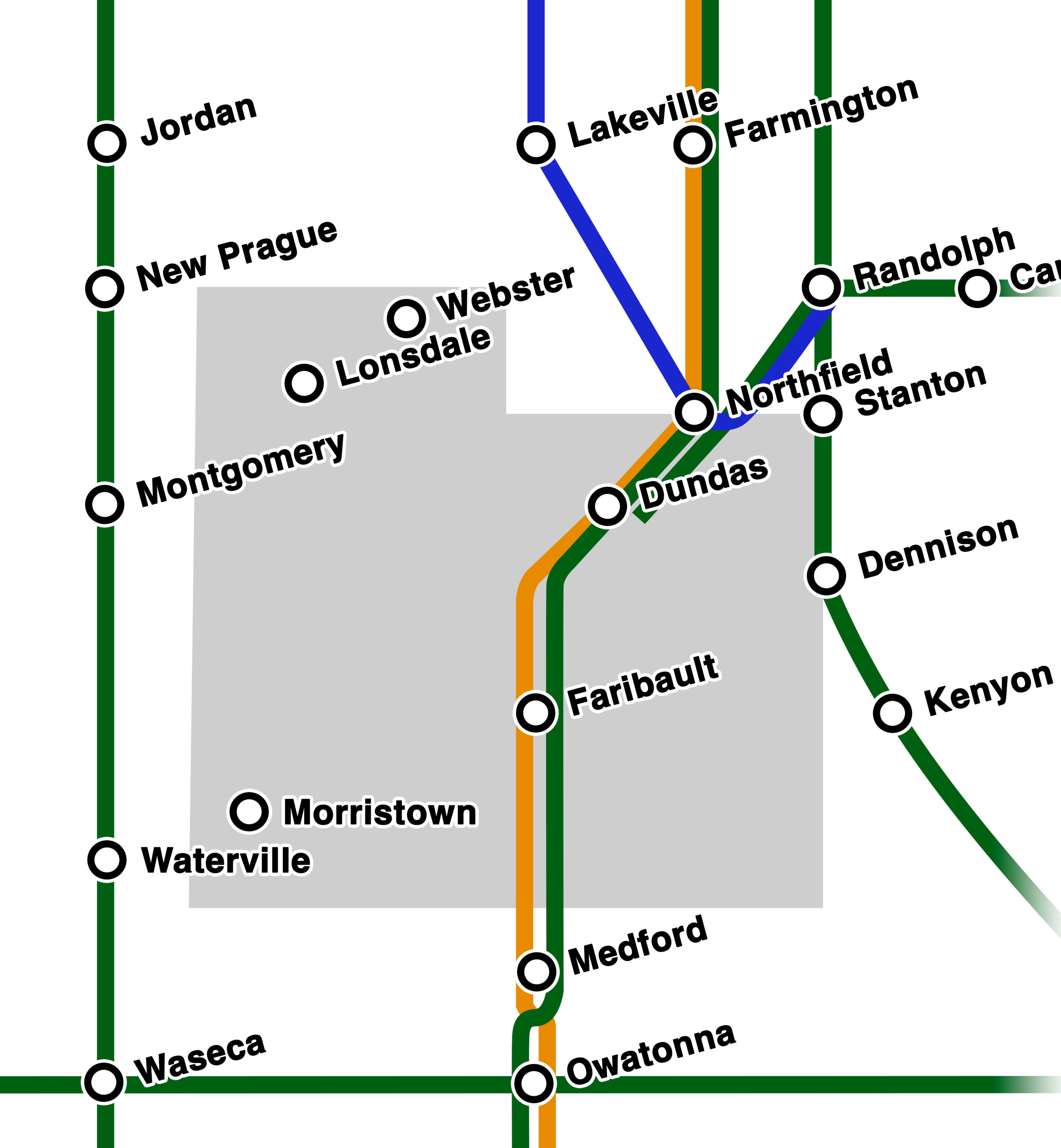
1980s

- 1980: Rock Island Ceases Operations, CNW becomes “temporary operator” of Spine Line through Rice County
- 1980: Staggers Act: Deregulation
 - Remove many rate constraints
 - Cut unprofitable routes
 - Spin-off to new regionals/shortlines
 - Saved railroading in the US



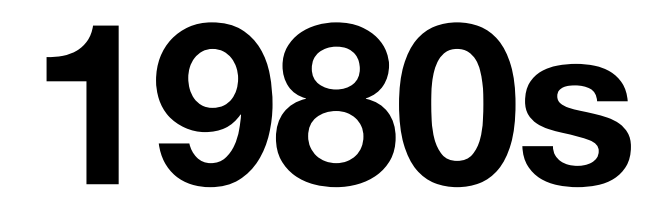
1980s

- 1980: Milwaukee Road rips up H&D, Zumbrota, Mankato lines
- CNW rips up Morristown-Waterville; date unknown

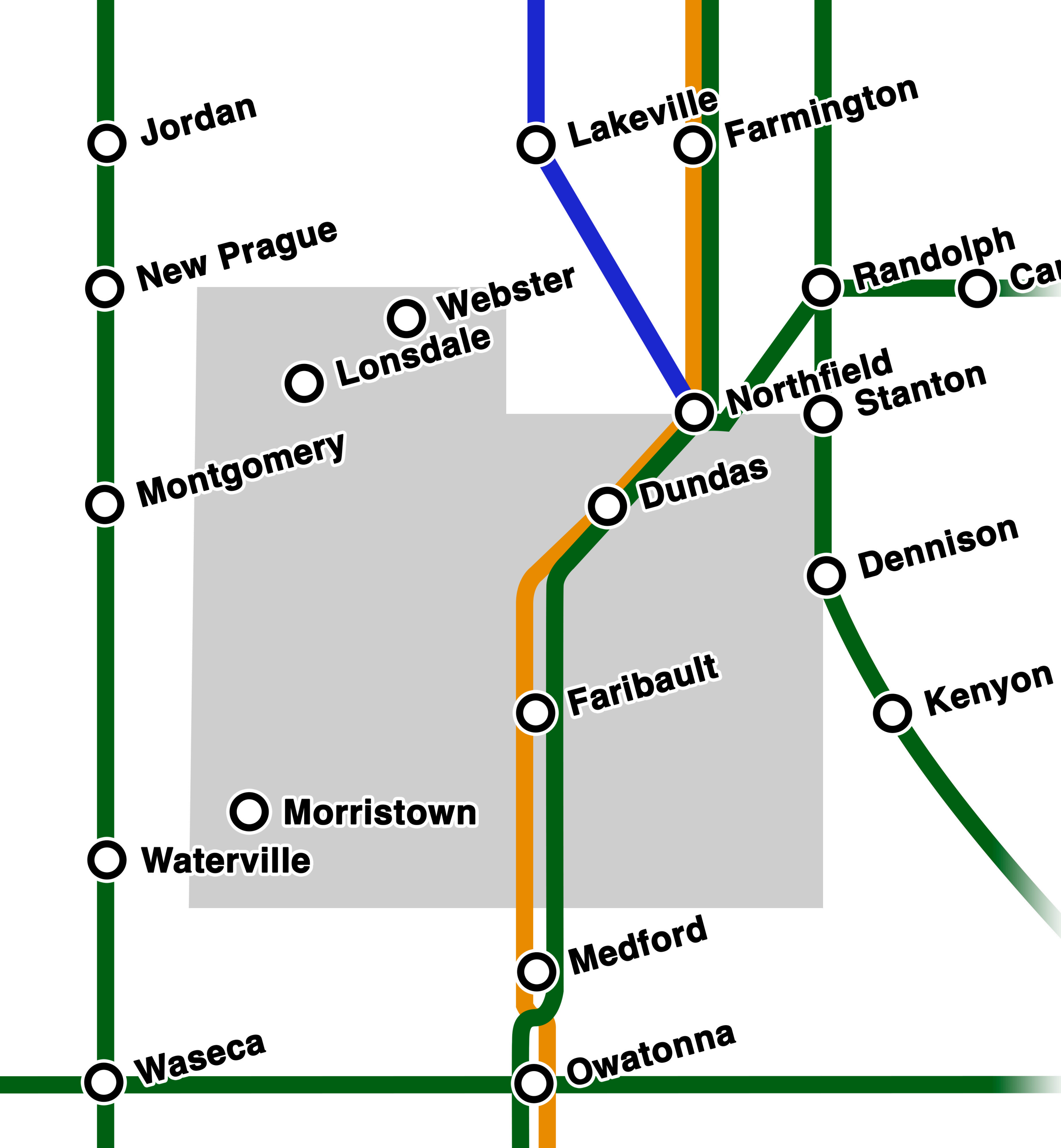


1980s

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- 1981: CNW formally acquires Rock Island Spine Line



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- 1981/2: CNW removes ex-CGW to Dundas



1980s

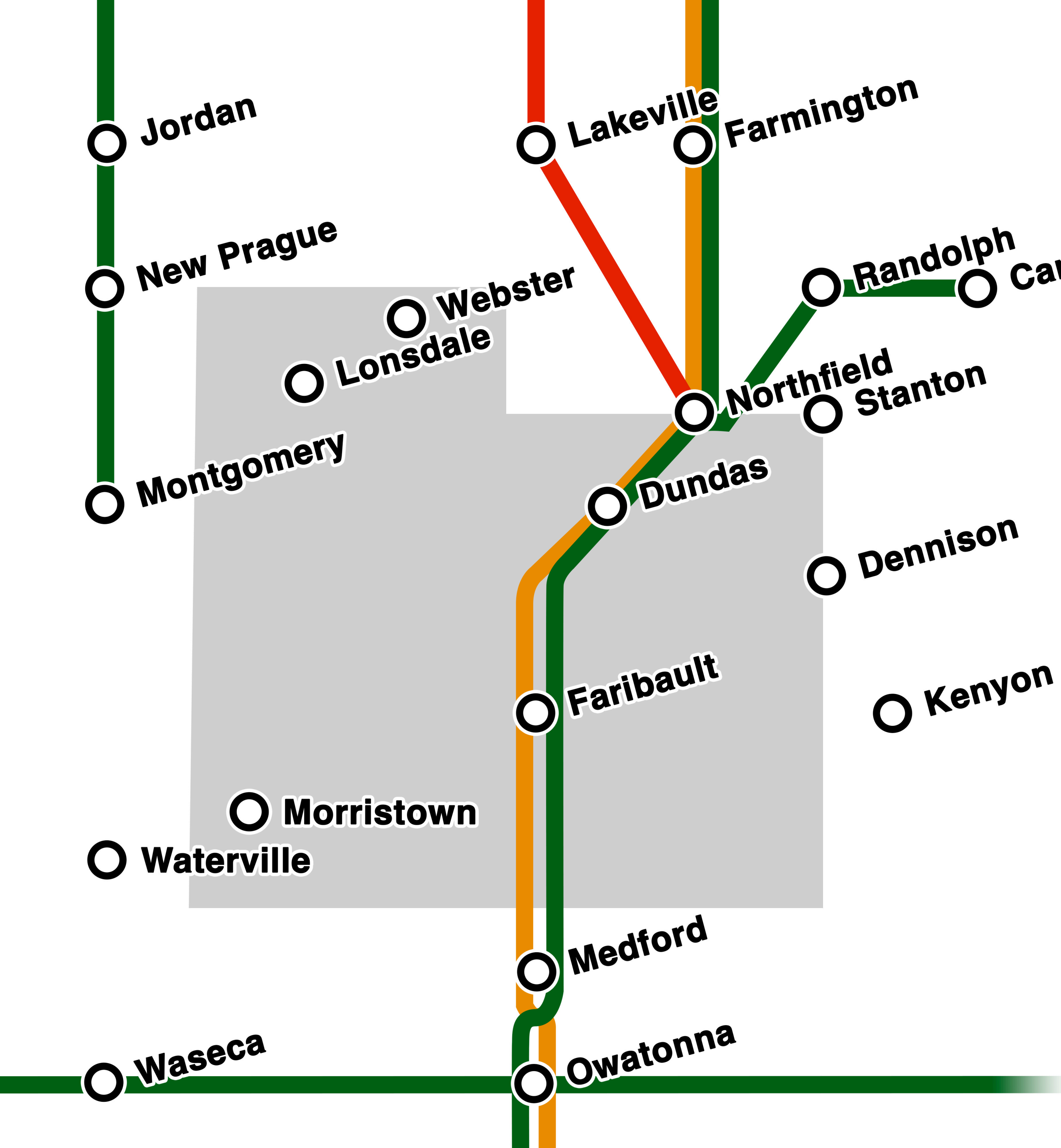
- 1980: Milwaukee Road rips up H&D, Zumbrota, Mankato lines
- 1981: CNW formally acquires Rock Island Spine Line
- 1981/2: CNW removes ex-CGW to Dundas
- ~1980: MN&S to Randolph winds down?



- 1982: Soo acquires the MN&S

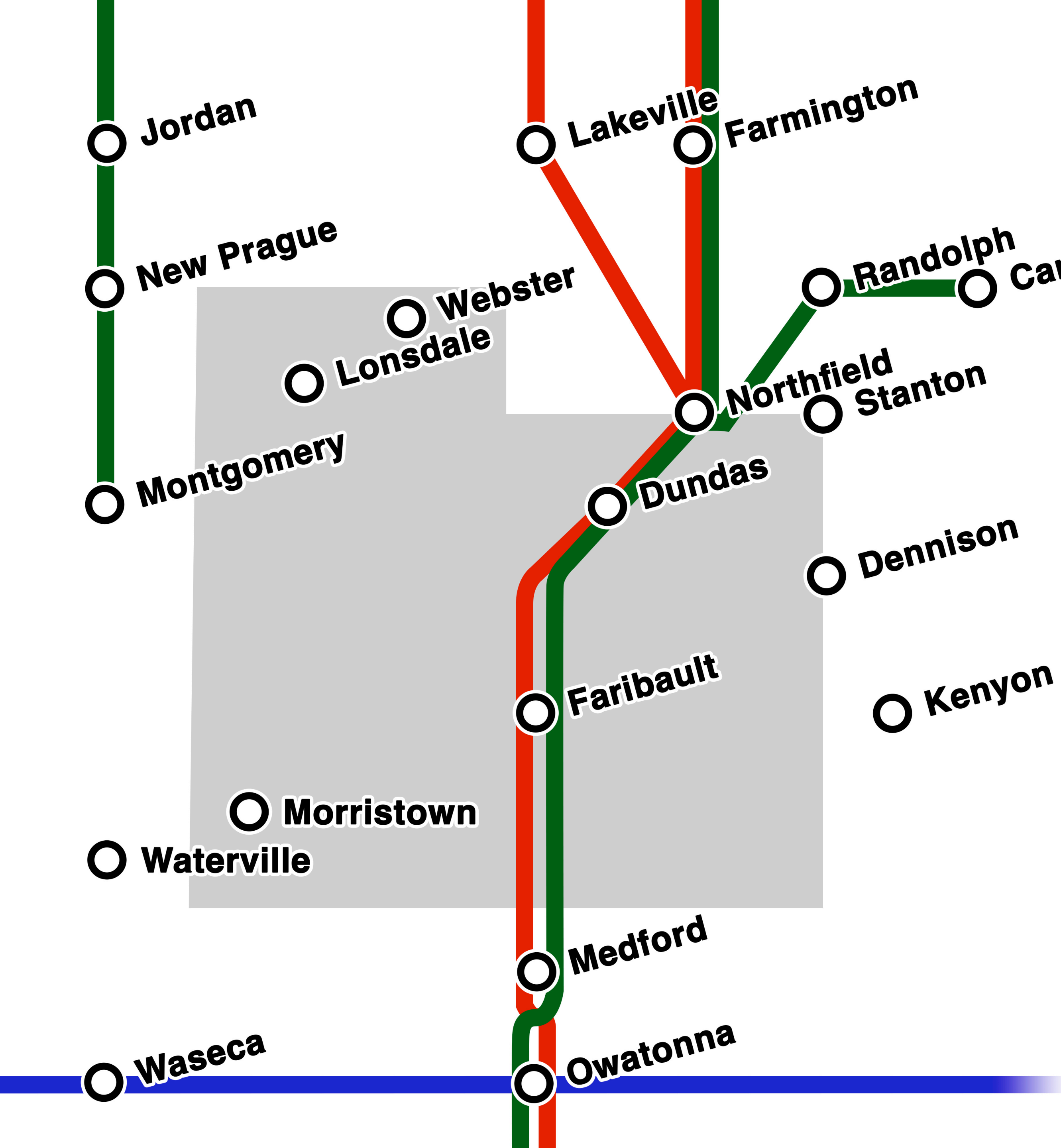


- 1982: Soo acquires the MN&S
- 1982: CNW rips up ex-CGW south of Randolph



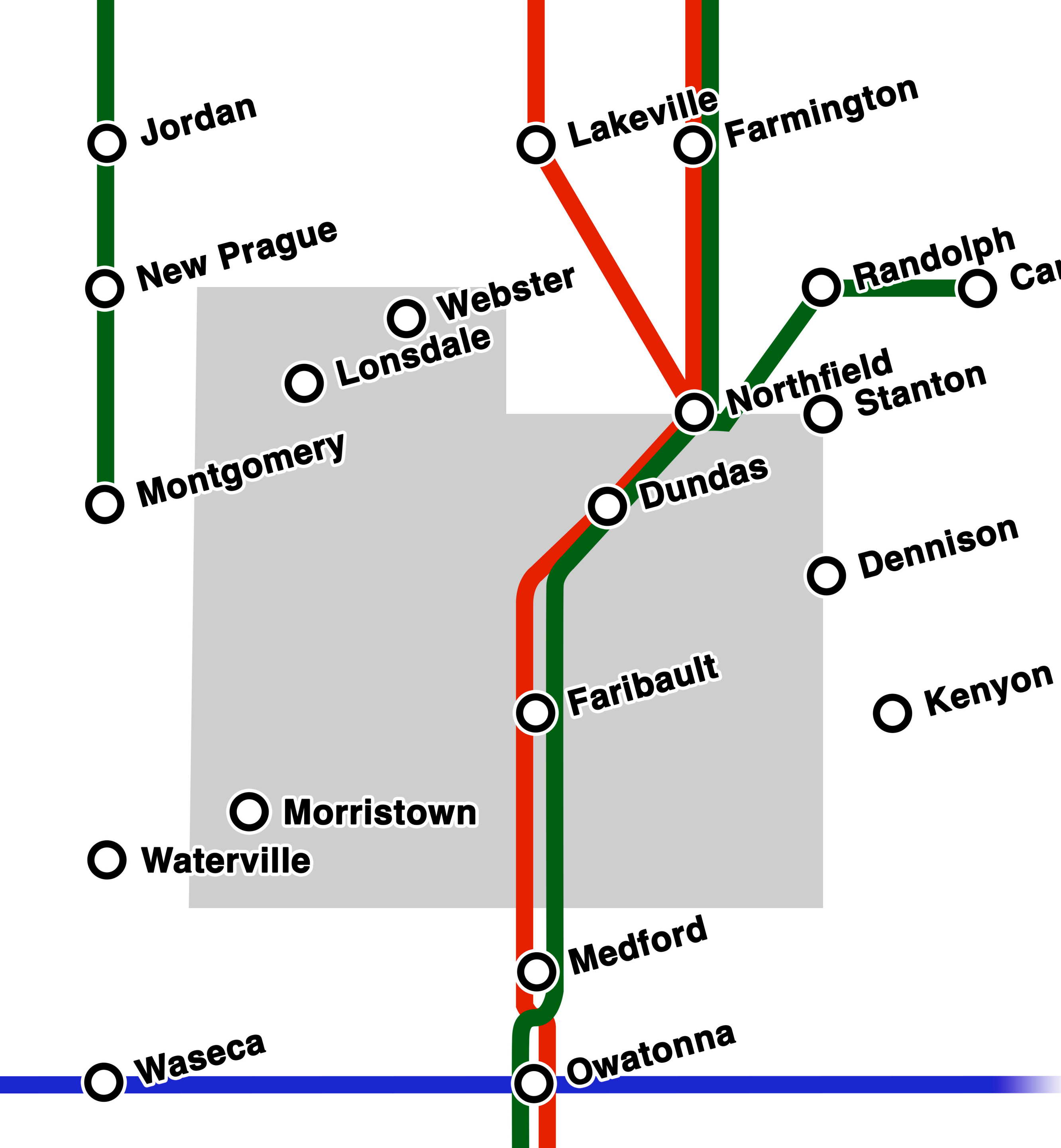
1980s

- 1982: Soo acquires the MN&S
- 1982: CNW rips up ex-CGW south of Randolph
- 1983: CNW rips up ex-CGW east of Cannon Falls
- 1984: CNW removes ex-MSTL south of Montgomery, ex-CGW north of Randolph



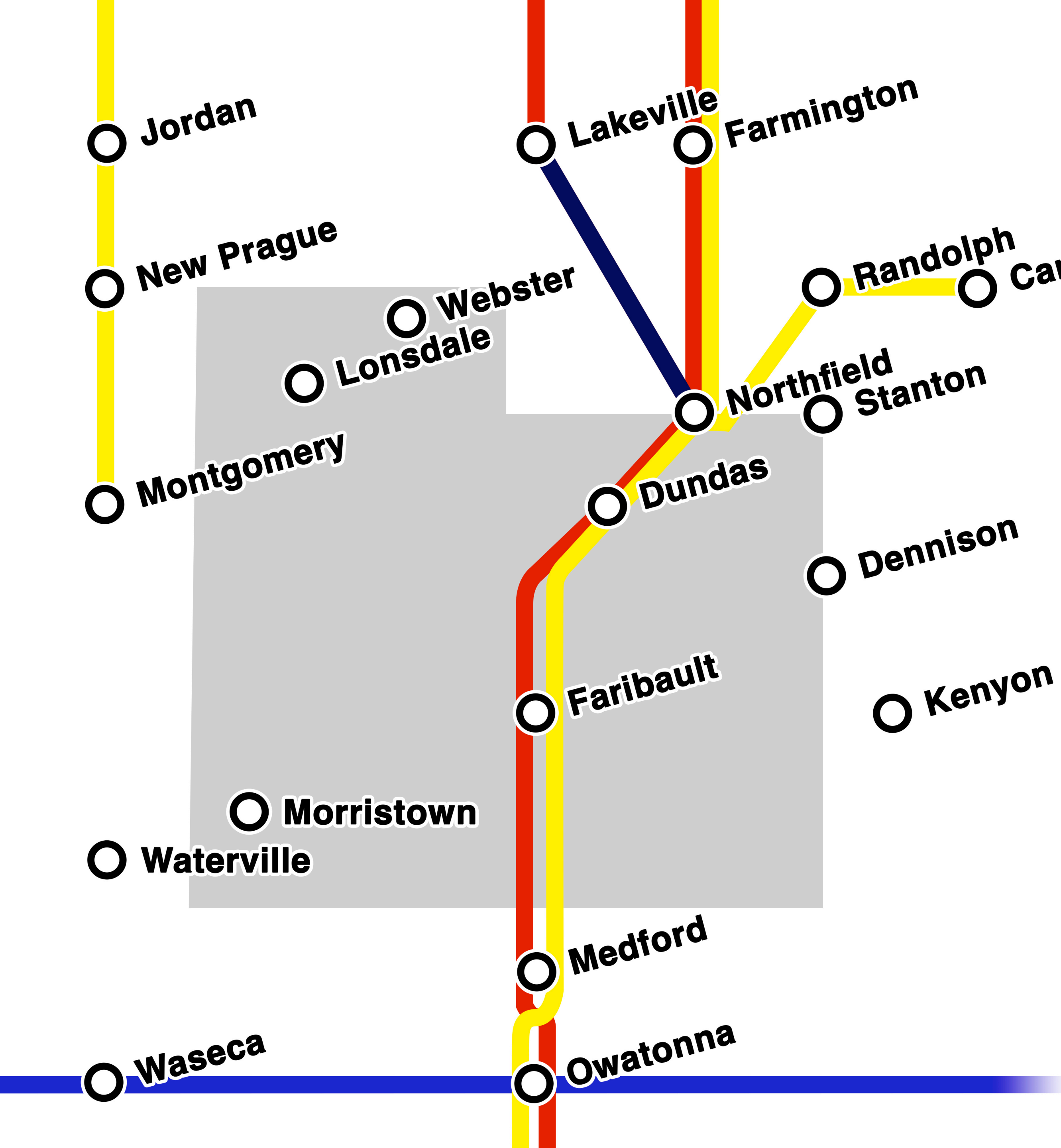
1980s

- 1986: Milwaukee acquired by Soo
- 1986: Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern takes over CNW line between Winona and Rapid City



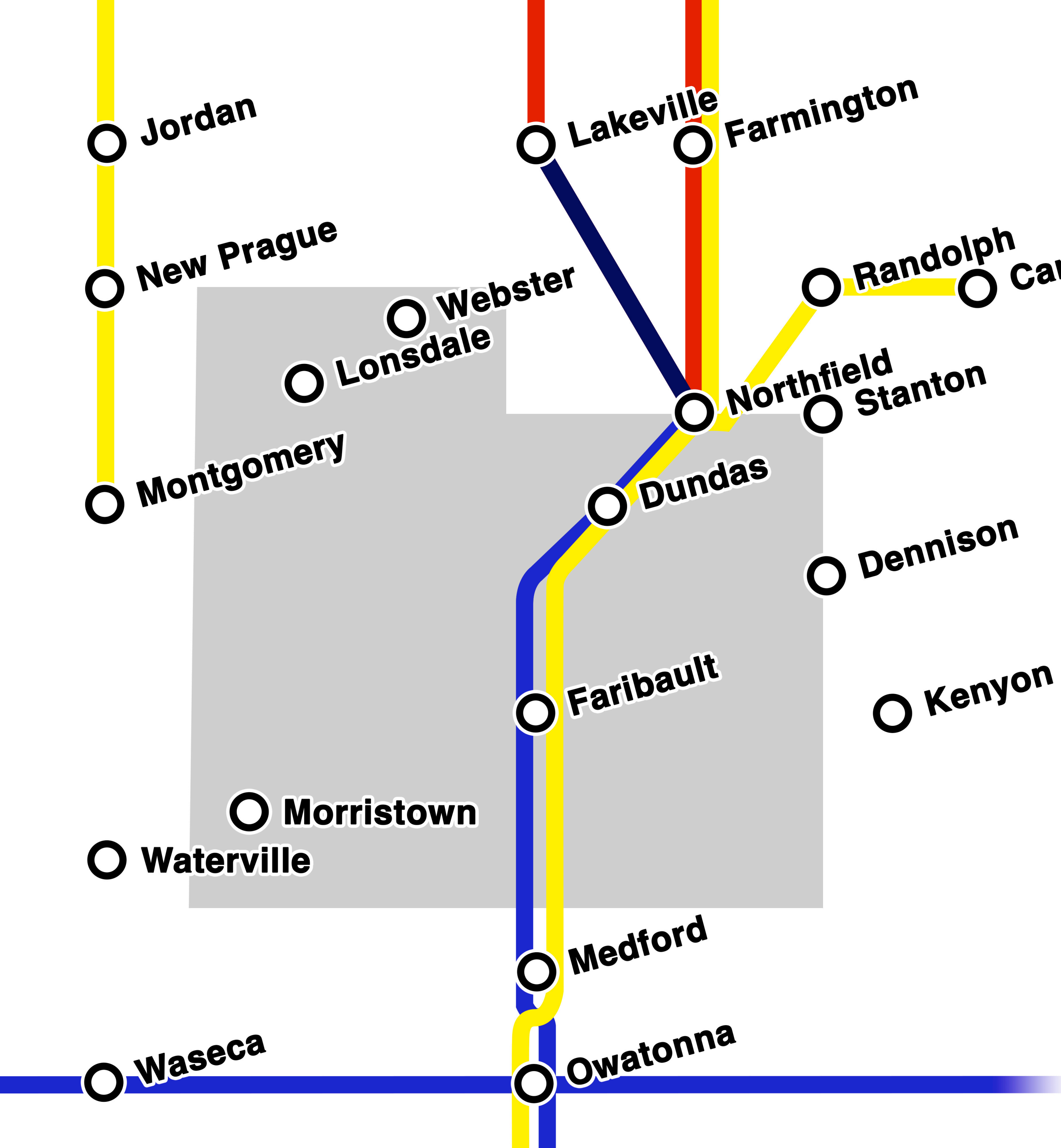
1990s

- 1990: Soo comes under full control of Canadian Pacific



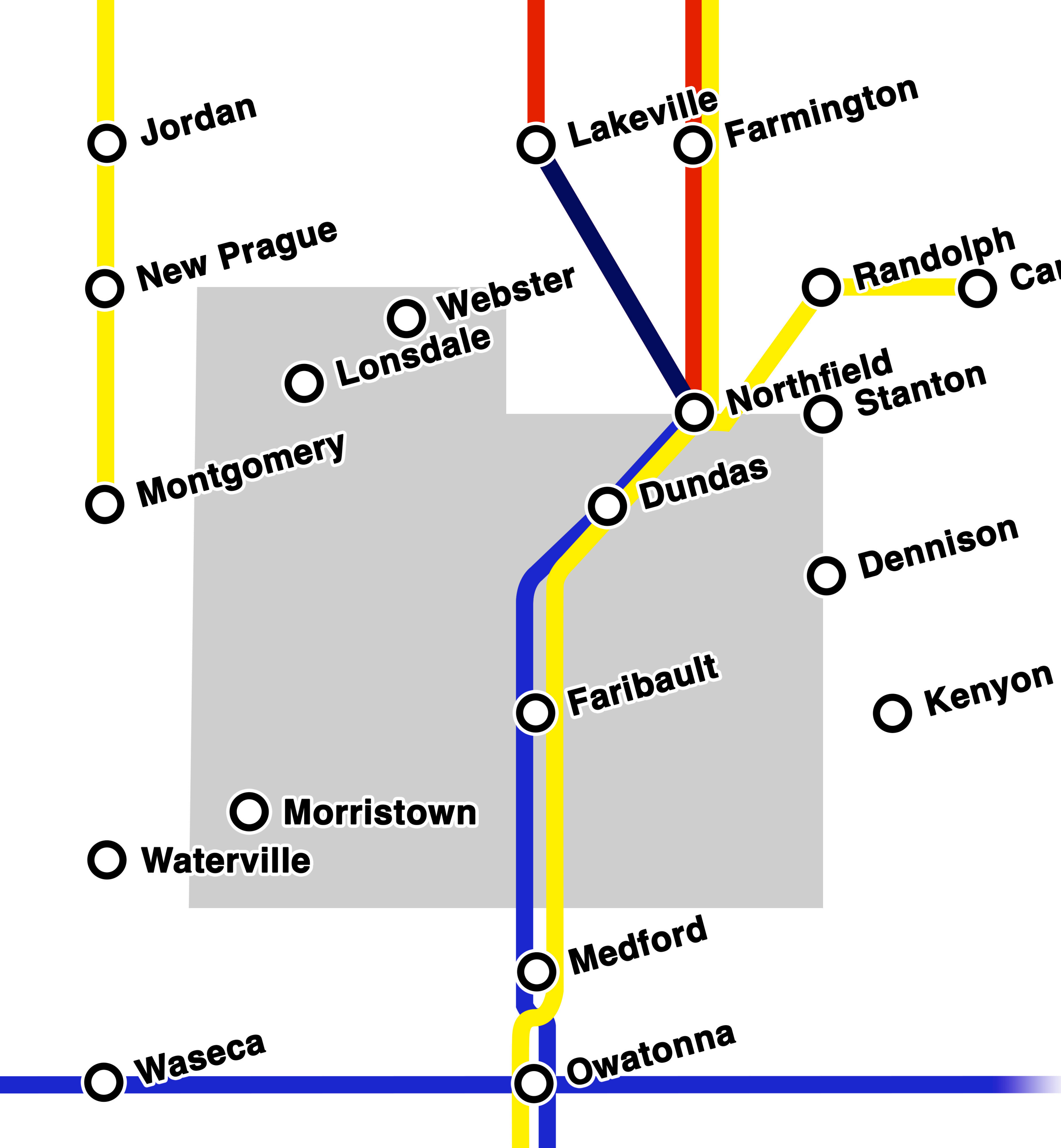
1990s

- 1990: Soo comes under full control of Canadian Pacific
- 1995: CNW acquired by Union Pacific
- 1996: Progressive Rail takes over CP between Lakeville and Northfield



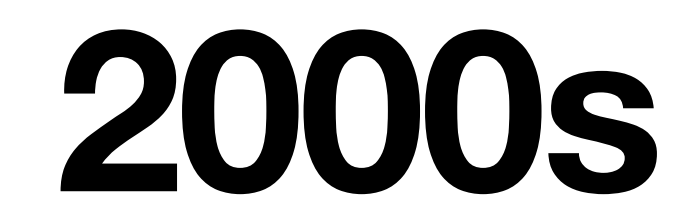
2000s

- 2002: IMRL to newly formed IC&E (a subsidiary of DM&E)

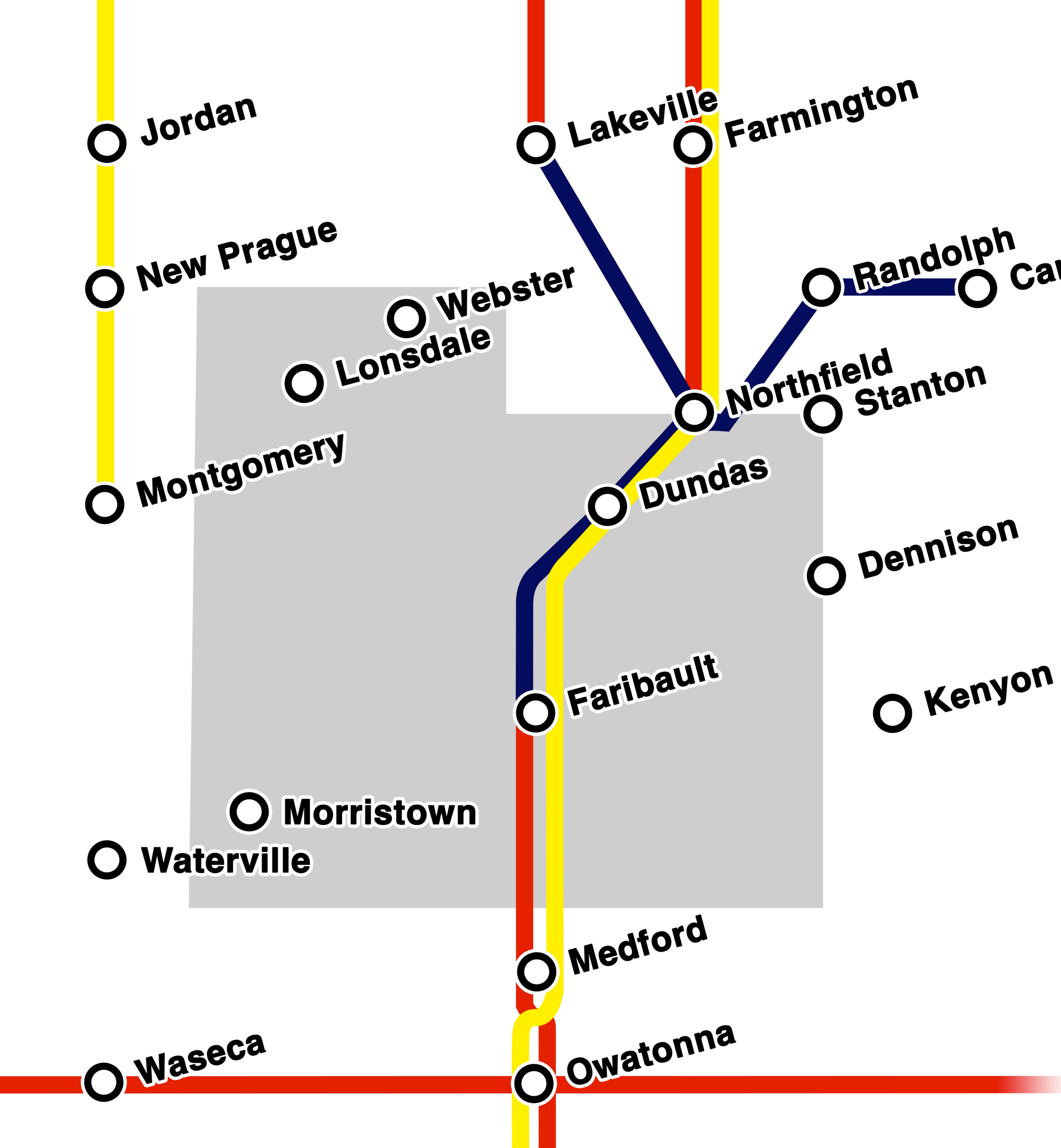


2000s

- 2002: IMRL to newly formed IC&E (a subsidiary of DM&E)
- 2003: Malting plant in Cannon Falls shuts down

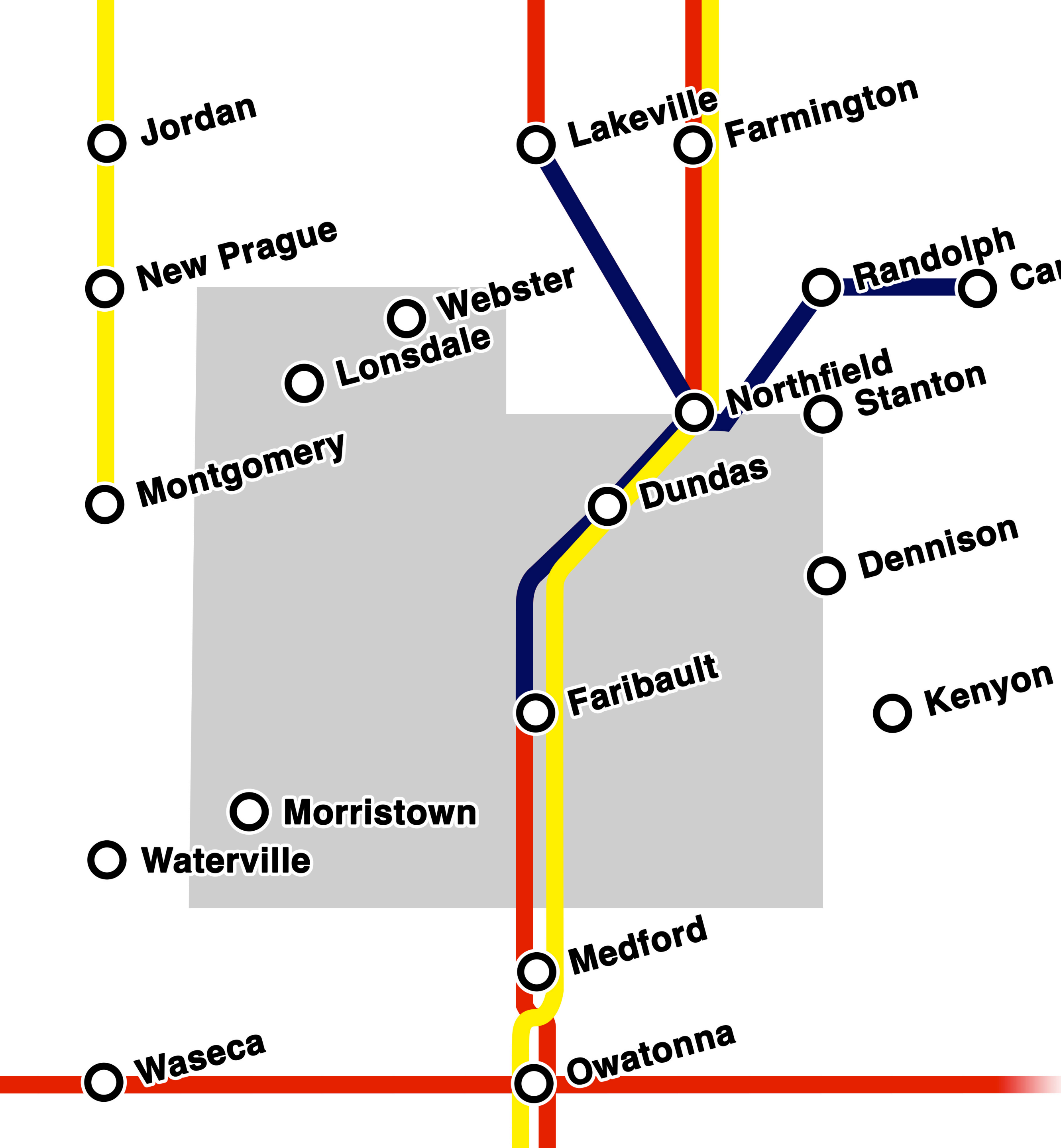


- 2002: IMRL to newly formed IC&E (a subsidiary of DM&E)
- 2003: Malting plant in Cannon Falls shuts down
- 2004: Progressive Rail starts service to Cannon Falls and Faribault
- Early 2000s: Qwest lays fiber along former Milwaukee and MN&S (Twin Cities - Des Moines)



2000s

- 2006: Progressive Rail proposes ethanol plant in Bridgewater Township (Comus), fails after local pushback (construction of new plants stagnates ~2010)
- 2008: Combined IC&E and DM&E sold to Canadian Pacific to gain access to Powder River Basin Coal (never happened) and new routes to Chicago and Kansas City



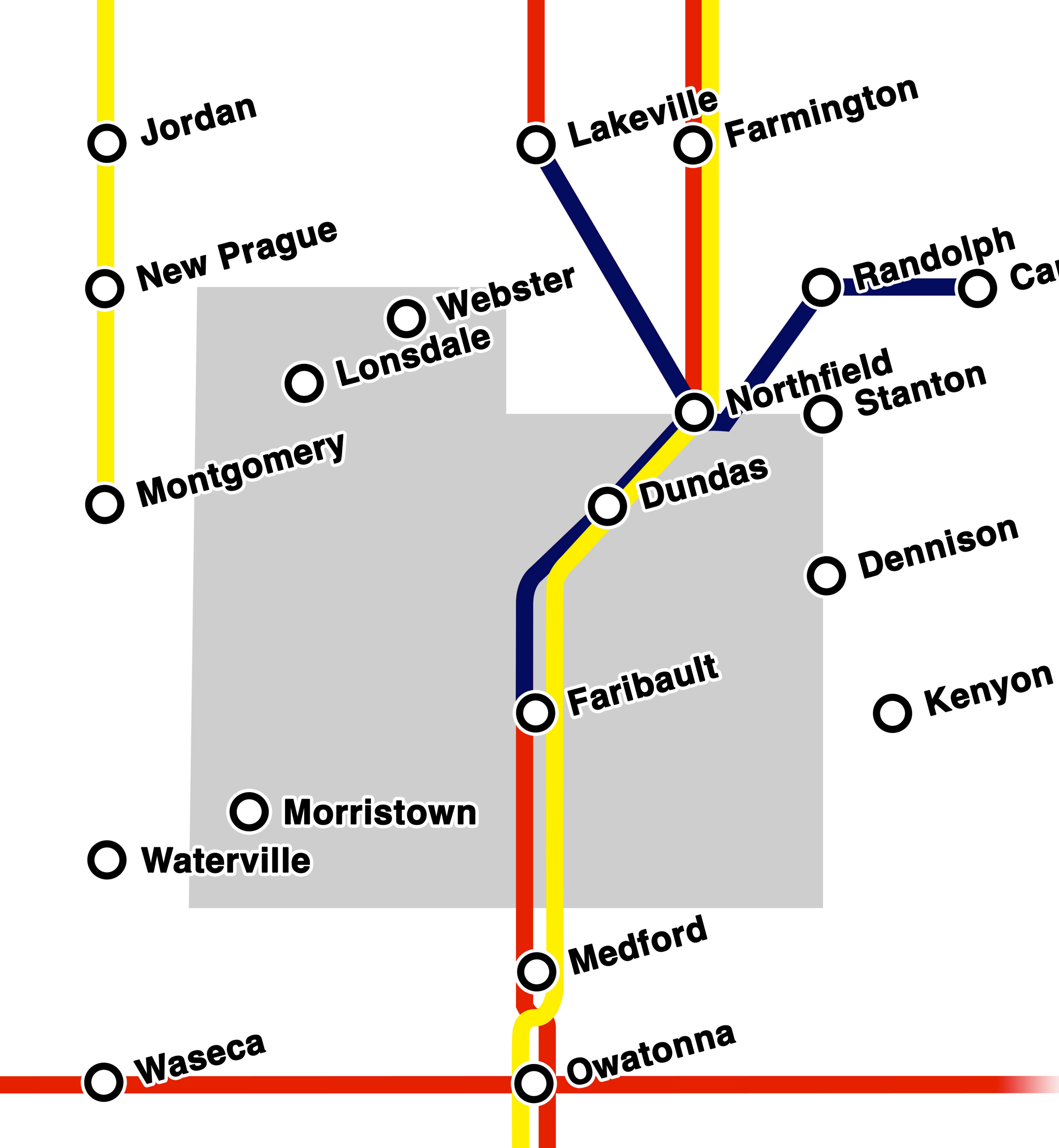
2010s

- 2010: Last train on CP south of Faribault (cars stored during Great Recession brought south)
- 2014: Grain shuttle terminal opens in Randolph
- 2015: Grain shuttle terminal opens in Hope (south of Owatonna)
- 2019: New Prague mill closes



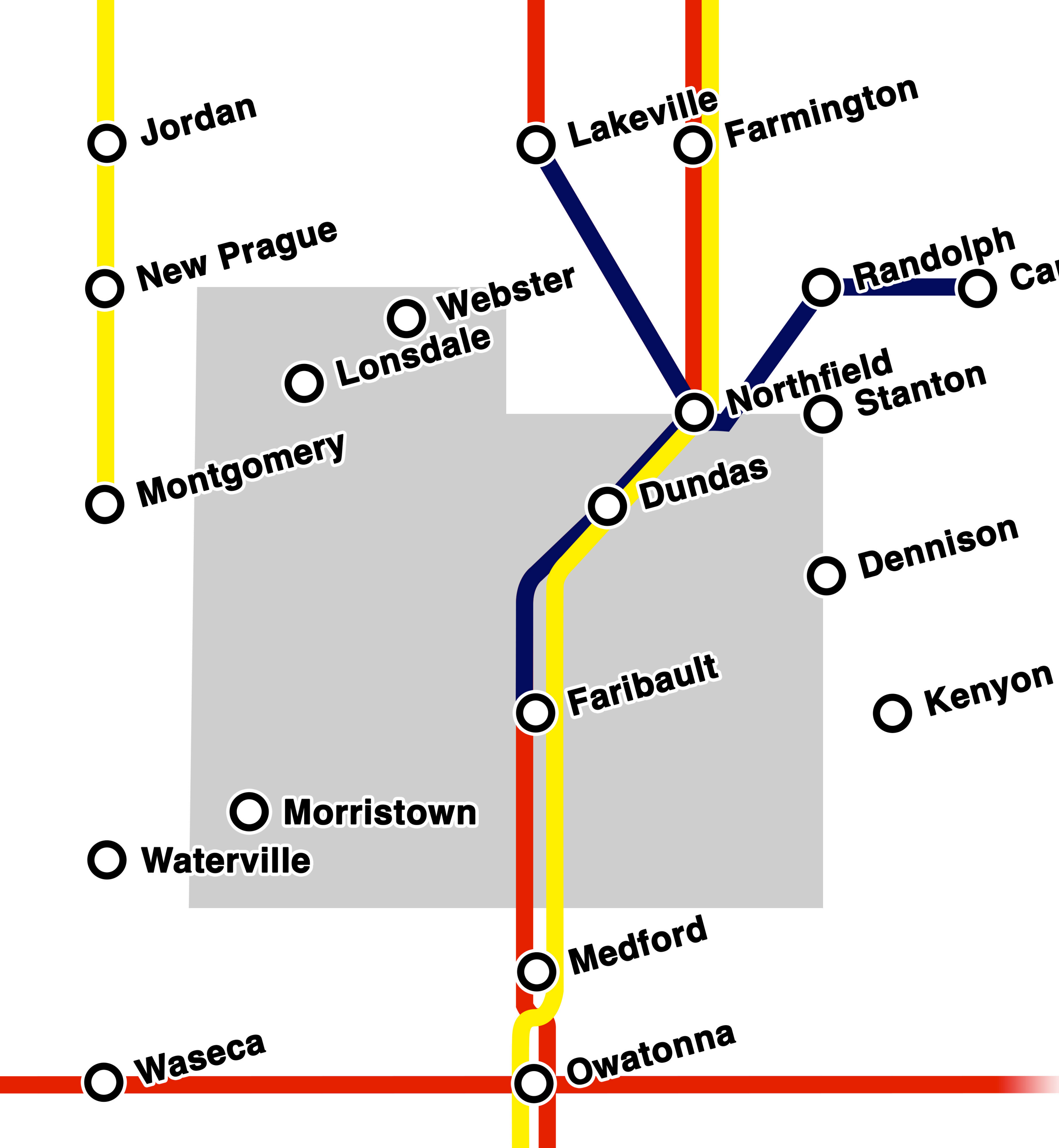
- 2023: CP merges with KCS to form CPKC
- First time in over a century that a Class I railroad isn't headquartered in the Twin Cities when CP US HQ moves from Minneapolis to Kansas City

Progressive Rail in 2024



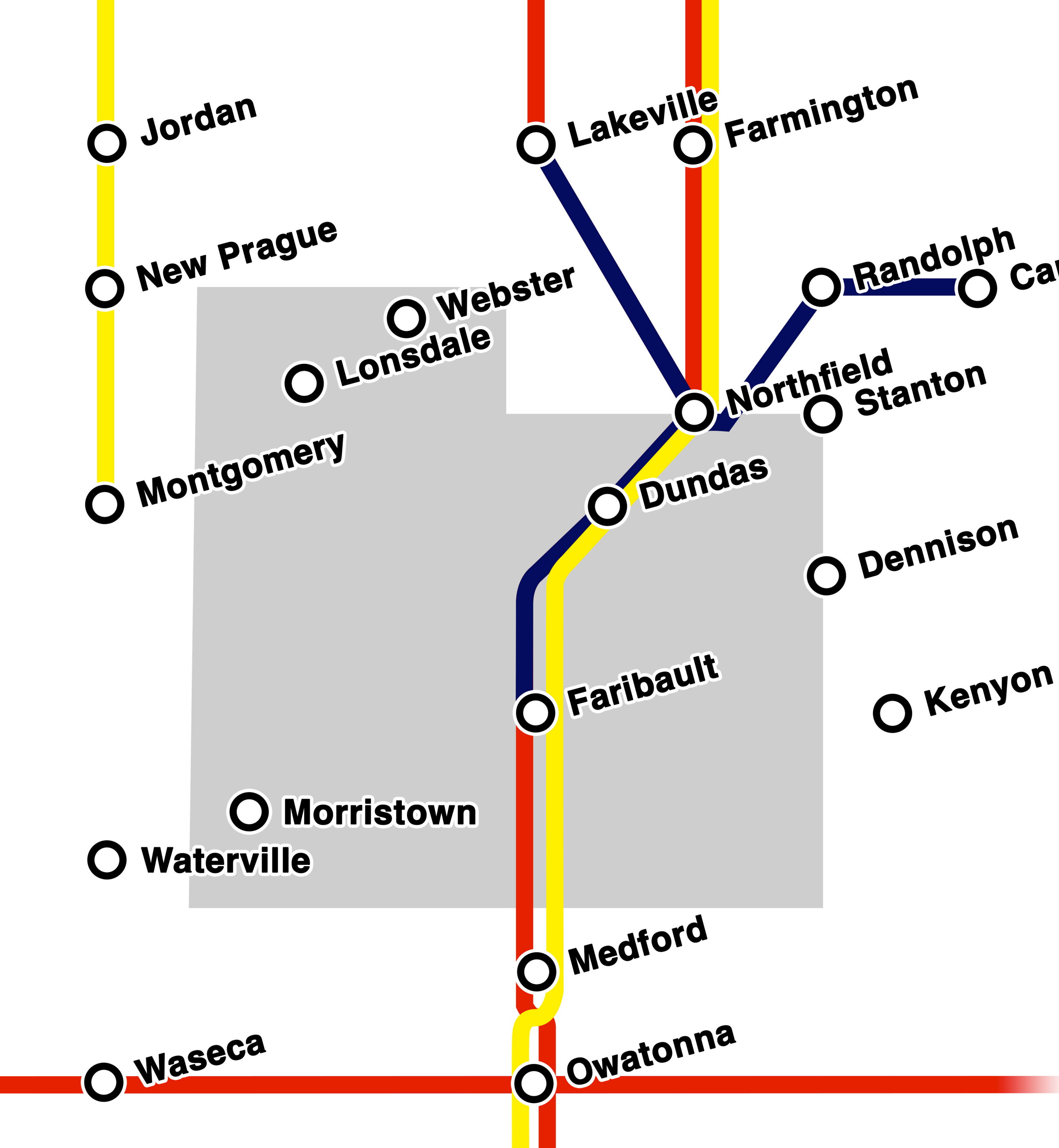
- Most activity in Lakeville (industrial park with several customers) and Northfield (Malt-O-Meal / Post)
- CPKC and UP run ~weekly trains to Northfield to drop off and pickup (interchange) cars for Progressive Rail customers
- Customers: Faribault Foods, grain shuttle facility in Randolph, transload operations (rail to truck) Randolph, Cannon Falls

Union Pacific in 2024



- Several grain shuttles per year to Randolph (Progressive crews operate UP trains between Northfield and Randolph)
- Misc. trains as opportunities arise (wind turbine components to Randolph)
- ~Weekly/as-needed to Montgomery for canned foods at Seneca, and speciality tank cars to Chart in New Prague

CPKC in 2024



- Minimal rail operations in Rice County, asides from ~weekly train to Northfield to interchange cars for Progressive Rail's Lakeville customers
- I suspect out of service lines are likely to remain for fiber optic revenue
- A few daily trains on the east-west line through Waseca and Owatonna