

Hello, my name is John Mitchell. I am a 6th generation farmer from Winnebago here in Winnebago County, and I also represent the interests of many local farm families as a Director on the board of the Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau.

There are many reasons why the Surface Transportation Board needs to conduct a full review of the proposed Great Lakes Basin Railroad. My family's farm and dairy cow barns are impacted at mile marker 20 of the Rockford subdivision. This is the point where the Great Lakes Basin line will connect to the existing Canadian National line. This rail line as proposed will dissect a corner of our farm leaving a 16 acre parcel separated out from the current 95 acre field, making this land more difficult and time-consuming to farm. We are not alone as over 33 parcels of land in Southwestern Winnebago County will be split up in such a manner or worse.

It seems to me that especially in this "Rockford Subdivision", Great Lakes Basin Railroad has not undertaken anywhere near the level of planning and consideration that it has along many other parts of its proposed route. A prime example of this in my neighborhood is the crossings at Edwardsville Rd. and Alworth Rd. These two roads meet in a "T" intersection, with the proposed route crossing within 150 feet of this intersection twice! My concern is compounded due to the location of the Delong Company grain elevator located on Alworth Rd. to the North. After a fatal train-semi accident at the current CN crossing in the fall of 2014, it was estimated that between 50-75 loads of grain per day would cross this route from the south during harvest season. These vehicles are very long and certainly cause traffic concerns with the GLB crossing so close to the intersection. Not to mention that vehicles coming from the SouthEast would have to cross 6! Railroad tracks per load to access the facility's grain bins and return home.

When I say that the GLB has not looked at this Rockford Subdivision closely, it is because of oversights like this: simply moving the route to the west side of the Edwardsville-Alworth intersection would completely eliminate one railroad crossing. Instead of actually spending the time to physically look at new construction (like our dairy barn) and buildings which have been torn down (like the house on the west side of this intersection), GLB seems to have simply relied on outdated satellite imagery.

In addition to my very local concerns, there are several other questions which at this point have been left unanswered. Three main areas of concern for farming operations will be water drainage, soil disturbance, and lost acreage. How will surface and subsurface water drainage be directed. Who will pay for the necessary adaptations? How much additional land will be adversely affected by construction activities? How will some of these areas be accessed for construction? What environmental impacts will that have? Many railroad flyovers will be created by this project, and by my math, would take a borrow pit of land 2.5 acres in size, and that is if the borrow pit is 10 feet deep. The water table along much of the route can be as shallow as 3 feet below the surface. How will the environmental impacts of this be mitigated?

As you can see, there are many concerns and questions that have been left unanswered about the construction and operation of the proposed Great Lakes Basin Railroad.