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PAMELA J. ALTHOFF

STATE SENATOR - 32ND DISTRICT

December 12, 2007

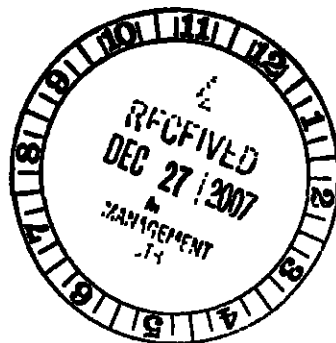
Secretary Vernon Williams
U S Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington DC 20423

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Dear Secretary Williams

I am writing with regard to the application filed by the Canadian National Railroad (CN) seeking regulatory authorization to acquire the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway Company (Docket # FD 35087)

I am a State Senator from Illinois and I represent the citizens of McHenry County. The Elgin, Joliet & Eastern (EJ&E) rail line currently operates in northeastern Illinois and northwestern Indiana over 198 miles of track consisting primarily of an arc around Chicago extending from Waukegan, IL southward to Joliet, then in an easterly direction to Gary, IN.

The reason for my writing is to express my concerns over the negative effects of this proposed acquisition. The proposed acquisition does not promote the public interest because it will endanger public safety and increase both rail traffic and motor vehicle traffic congestion.

While the EJ&E line does not run directly through McHenry County, it will most certainly impact the safety of my constituents as well as other citizens throughout the region. My primary concern, should the acquisition be approved, is the dramatic increase in the additional number of trains which will be travelling on the EJ&E line.

It seems that the primary purpose of the EJ&E acquisition is to allow CN trains to bypass the bottleneck of rail congestion in Chicago's inner core by dispersing CN trains along the EJ&E arc on the periphery of the Chicago metropolitan area. It is my understanding that the EJ&E line currently provides rail service to approximately 100 customers, including steel mills, coal utilities, plastics and chemical producers, steel processors, distribution centers and scrap processors. Should the acquisition be approved, in addition to the trains which already use the line, the additional CN trains will cause an obvious increase in train traffic. Also, it is likely that CN will grant trackage rights to other railroads, thereby causing additional train traffic.

Due to the amount of motor vehicle traffic in the suburban area, railroad crossings are extremely dangerous. The EJ&E line crosses many of the region's major roadways. Countless thousands of vehicles, including school buses, traverse these roadways on a daily basis. According to the Illinois Commerce Commission, there are 133 public highway-rail grade crossings on the EJ&E line. A major increase in the number of trains using this line is a recipe for disaster.

In addition, the Chicago metropolitan region is usually rated among the worse locations in the nation when it comes to motor vehicle traffic congestion. According to one regional planning group, "Chicago area residents spend more time commuting to their jobs than the residents of any other region in the country, except New York. Chicago area traffic congestion is among the worst in the country and is getting worse at a rate of 1.3% per year." Congestion cripples the economy and results in increased travel time, wasted fuel and a diminishment in the overall quality of life. Increasing the number of trains on this line will simply aggravate an already bad situation.

If more trains equal increased motor vehicle congestion and traffic time, will desperate motor vehicle operators take unwarranted risks to "bear" oncoming trains at grade crossings?

We must also consider the environmental impact of this proposed acquisition. If additional trains exacerbate current traffic congestion and lead to more intense gridlock, the exhaust from these vehicles will diminish regional air quality. An increase in congestion also means an increase in the amount of gasoline which is wasted while these motor vehicles sit in traffic which does not move.

This is not a pathway to solving the problem of congestion. I believe that, rather than shifting the problem of congestion from Chicago to the suburbs, we need a well-reasoned, regional approach to the issue and not attempt to solve the problem piecemeal.

In closing, it is my belief that approval of this acquisition does not promote the public interest. Any transportation benefit provided by the acquisition would be clearly outweighed by the safety concerns, increased congestion, wasted fuel and environmental problems caused by its approval. These are all issues which I hope the Surface Transportation Board will consider prior to making its decision on this matter.

Regards,



Pamela J. Althoff
Illinois State Senator
32nd District

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