

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS OF WANDA KEMBER  
RURAL RESIDENT AND FARMER OF SERENA TOWNSHIP, LASALLE COUNTY, IL

TO: David Navecky  
Surface Transportation Board  
395 E. Street SW  
Washington, DC 20423-0001

RE: Docket No. FD 35952  
Environmental Scoping Comments to Great Lakes Basin Transportation proposal

I, Wanda Kember, introduce myself as a Senior Citizen residing on a family farm in rural Serena, Township IL. I write tendering a number of environmental issues which I ask be investigated as part of environmental impact study relevant to the proposed Great Lakes Basin Transportation proposal. As proposed, the rail will bisect the family farm that has been in our family for many generations. The project will render some of our ground landlocked and make our farming of split fields difficult and more expensive. It will destroy the pristine Indian Creek bottom land where childhood memories of play and reunions were made for generations of my family. It will change my rural peaceful farm into a noisy undesirable mess. I understand that these projects need to go somewhere. I also know that someone must be hurt by a project like this. While I had to vent my personal anger about this project, I will concentrate the balance of my comments on significant environmental concerns in need of investigation as part of any serious environmental study.

Safety Issues

-Emergency Response Times

Access to my property and many other rural residents in my area is through a network of rural township roads. Area highway commissions have uniformly suggested that many roadways will be shut down as it is not practical to establish gate crossing on all rural roadways. Should a number of roads be closed for lack of a rail crossings, emergency Ambulance and Fire response times will significantly get longer. This will jeopardize the ability of such providers to save property and lives. We are sufficiently rural that we do not have multiple emergency response agencies to respond to rural emergencies. The railroad will significantly reduce the quality of emergency services to all residents in rural areas such as where I live.

-Hazardous Substance Release Response Time

Our fire and ambulance services are rural and the tax base does not support paid professionals. Our emergency providers take pride in the training of volunteers and paid-on-call workers, but they are not professionals. No area emergency service providers have timely access to people trained to respond to a hazardous materials release nor do we have needed equipment. Most of our rural area draws water from shallow aquifers. Farm drains are area creeks, such as the historic Indian Creek that runs through my farm, would quickly migrate hazardous substances. We are accustomed to trains conveying farm commodities and sand not hazardous materials. We are not equipped for trains conveying hazardous substances.

### Land Use Issues

My farm and LaSalle County farms in general contain some of the best farm ground available in and needed by our country. The proposed railway boldly demands a wide strip of land which for the foreseeable future will be permanently taken from agricultural production. No quality land use planner would suggest that this rail project was designed with consideration of highest and best use of land. Rather they would find the project planned simply on the best economics of the rail developer. The land use plans of Serena Township and LaSalle County are designed to protect valuable high quality farm ground.

### Infringement on Natural Areas

The path of the railroad will also traverse valued wetland and watershed areas. Recreation paddling flourishes on the nearby Fox River where local outfitters allow many thousands of visitors to flow through beautiful scenic and undeveloped areas. While Indian Creek does not have the volume of paddlers and visitors, it is equally scenic and beautiful and has been used for recreational purposes by landowners and their visitors for generations. Constant train traffic will destroy this environment.

### Coordination with Existing Transportation System

LaSalle County has an extensive existing transportation system. For this reason, much of our population works in the transportation and warehouse industry. Our area transportation corridors include the navigable Illinois River, several existing rail lines traditionally used to transport silica sand and agricultural commodities, and multiple Interstate highways being I80, I39 and I55. The proposed railway, if truly needed, should be located within or near one or more of the existing transportation systems. This project appears to ignore any coordination of the railroad with existing transportation systems but just boldly seeks to spread an environment blight across our valuable agricultural and watershed resources. While traveling on nearby I55 south to Springfield where our Illinois State Fair is held, a railway follows the interstate for many miles. This is how transportation networks should be designed, to minimize the amount of land which must suffer from the ill effects of rail or interstate transportation.

### Conclusion

I hope you consider with care the above environmental concerns. While I understand there may be a need for a project like this, I depend on my government and people like you to make private industry operate with environmental good judgement and not just operate on what is cheapest and where they can pick on people who do not have political clout.

Dated this May 13 - 2016

Sincerely,

Wanda L Kember  
Wanda Kember  
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