

May 9, 2016

Mr. Dave Navecky

Surface Transportation Board

395 E Street SW

Washington, D. C. 20423-0001

Reference: Docket No. FD 35952-Proposed Great Lakes Basin Railroad

Dear Mr. Navecky:

I am writing to you regarding the proposed Great Lakes Basin railroad bypass around the Chicago region. I own farmland in Ogle County, Illinois very close to the proposed rail route.

I want the Surface Transportation Board to know that I am strongly opposed to this project.

The following are some issues, important to me, for you to consider:

A REAL NEED?

I question how many freight trains that originate from either coast actually pass through the Midwest without being broken up and reconfigured somewhere in the Midwest. An example is the BNSF which has a very large freight yard in Galesburg, Illinois where they do reconfigure their trains; Galesburg is not in the immediate Chicago area, but is not that far from this proposed project.

Railroad route maps across the continental U. S. show most large railroads, such as BNSF, UP, CP and N&W as examples, do not extend across the entire lower 48, so coast to coast railroad freight has to be handed off from one company to another somewhere mid-continent.

Is this project just a veiled attempt to relocate the rolling pipeline crude oil trains out of the Chicago suburbs and into pristine farm country where there are fewer local people to complain about them? I have heard that the crude oil production in the Dakotas has dropped substantially because of the amount of oil available from elsewhere, so is this project a good idea long-term? What if the market for oil changes further during the planning and development of this project (these processes themselves being long-term), and there is a further reduced need for crude oil trains travelling from west to east? These crude oil trains are rolling bombs, an accident waiting to happen. We do not need this in food producing regions.

Why does the proposer want to start from scratch with a brand new right of way? There appears to be a number of existing railroad rights of way in the region where this route is planned which are

underutilized, abandoned, in need of repair or upgrading which could be integrated with what is proposed without such a large "land grab" of precious farmland. If this project is really needed, such an alternate should be seriously considered.

Why do they need a 200 ft. wide right of way across relatively flat land? I do not know of any two track railroad that is anywhere close to 200 ft. wide. If they have any ideas of sticking a pipeline or other infrastructure in that space, that should be prohibited. Will this right of way be perpetually maintained to match the surrounding landscape or allowed to degenerate into a weed and brush covered strip, as so many railroad rights of way already are?

Is it legal for a private entity to force landowners to sell (give-up) land if they do not want to do so? Many farm properties have been in the same family ownership for generations – for them farming is a way of life – not just a financial investment to be bargained away. This project would break apart many farm parcels and make access to them more difficult, especially if lesser used roads are cut off.

What about drainage, both surface and below ground? Any railroad construction will definitely affect surface drainage. But how will subsurface tile drainage be maintained? In many cases, tiles were installed years ago and their locations are not accurately known. They will certainly be broken, even unknowingly, and become ineffective due to railroad construction. Such situations are likely to not even be noticed until after construction is completed. Who will be responsible for mitigating lands not now subject to flooding which do flood during and post construction?

Has there been any thought given to how much time in a 24 hour period that these trains will block vehicular traffic at grade crossings? At 10 minutes per train and 100 trains per 24 hour interval, this would amount to more than 16 hours per such period at each grade crossing over the entire project length. Keep in mind that this project is proposed in areas where there are fewer roads in the first place (with some even being proposed to be cut off); this will result in longer distances and travel times for residents to access health care, emergency responses, etc. This is a very significant problem.

Will there be any increase in noise and ground vibration in the vicinity? This area is not devoid of living beings. There are people and livestock who live nearby.

Railroads also bring contamination to the land. Everything mechanical that is intended to contain liquids eventually leaks, and with so many proposed train units, contamination of the soil and groundwater near this facility will occur where there is none presently. This would be even worse with crude oil unit trains.

PROJECT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE?

With the proposed \$8 billion cost (who ever saw a project built within the originally proposed budget?), a simple "back of the envelope" analysis would indicate a cost to the railroad companies that use this facility of at least \$10,000 per train trip, given the use projection of 100 trains per day, with a cost payback period of 20 years. That figure does not include additional costs such as labor,

maintenance, taxes, interest, insurance, profits, etc. Would not the railroad companies prefer to invest that amount of money to improve their own facilities, rather than give it to somebody else?

BOONDOGGLE IN THE MAKING?

How many acres of the best quality, most productive farm ground in the world would this project take out of production as well as reduce the productivity of the nearby lands? As the world population grows at an ever increasing rate, the need for food production will increase in parallel. All food production requires land to make it happen.

Remember, productive farmland cannot be manufactured – the supply is limited to what we have now, and should not be allowed to be diminished.

I hope you seriously consider these points in your evaluation. I see no beneficial attributes to this project.

Thank you.



Charles W. Pfingsten

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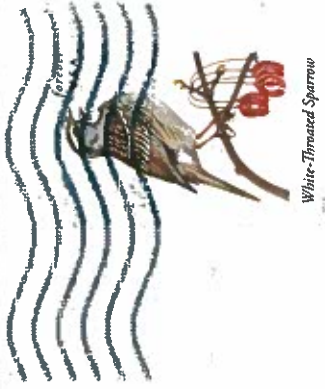
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