

Clinton FFA Alumni Association



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President:
Josh Jones

Vice President:
Loren Bobolz

Secretary:
Amber Keller

Treasurer:
Larry Lader
P.O. Box 69
Avalon, WI 53505
(608) 754-9156
llader@alumni.caltech.edu

Directors:

Katie Clothier

Amber Keller

Bill Kutz

Gary Sommers

Clinton, Wisconsin
May 10, 2016

Mr. Dave Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
Re: Docket No. FD 35952

The Clinton FFA Alumni Association, Inc. urges the Surface Transportation Board to take the issues addressed below into the highest consideration during its environmental review of the proposed Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. railway (GLBT) Docket No. FD 35952. The Clinton FFA Alumni is an educational support group affiliated with the National FFA Organization. The National FFA (Future Farmers of America) was created and received its charter from the United States government in 1928. FFA is a co-curricular part of secondary school agriculture education. The views expressed in this letter are those of the Clinton FFA Alumni and do not represent the National FFA, National FFA Alumni Association or the Wisconsin FFA Alumni Association.

It should be noted that an overwhelming majority of the citizens residing in the Clinton, Wisconsin school district are vehemently opposed to this project. If GLBT is approved dozens of southern Wisconsin citizens will have their property confiscated under the power of eminent domain for the private gain of Mr. Frank Patton and an unidentified group of investors. Mr. Patton is not from this area and has yet to identify any long term benefits to this area or to its residents. The people here are concerned with the lack of transparency in the GLBT proposal. We do not know how many trains there will be, what their cargo will be, nor who (other than Mr. Patton) will profit. The taking of property under these circumstances would set an extremely dangerous precedent. That said, as our purpose is support of education and in particular agriculture education, the Clinton FFA Alumni will limit our specific objections to how the environmental impact of the GLBT proposal will negatively affect the education of students in the Clinton area.

The construction and operation of GLBT, as proposed, would be detrimental to all education in Clinton, Wisconsin school district with certain aspects that will do unique harm to agriculture education. Some of the problems are clear and direct, more are hidden and indirect. In addition, the safety of all students will be compromised and the safety of agriculture education students will be especially challenged.

The proposed route of GLBT runs very close (within one mile) to the Clinton schools. The noise from a large number of trains passing by would be a constant disruption for students and teachers. It would make it unlikely that students would be able to concentrate enough to learn at the level of students in neighboring districts. The vibrations from long fast moving trains weighing more than 10 thousand tons would be felt within the school. This would make it difficult to properly conduct laboratory exercises and demonstrations. Excessive vibrations would also shorten the expected lifespan of our school buildings. This would be even more true of the greenhouse used by the agriculture classes. The drip system used for some of the watering in the greenhouse is necessarily delicate. Train vibrations would destroy its value as an educational tool.

Schools all over the United States are starting their school day later as it is known that tired students do not learn effectively. If GLBT is approved many Clinton students would need to be on school busses earlier in the day than they are now as transportation times would be dramatically increased. Many students live in homes that are even nearer to the proposed tracks than are the schools. These students would have their sleep disrupted and would struggle to do class assignments at home.

Students are encouraged to participate in after school activities such as FFA, sports, music and other arts. These activities frequently last until after dark and many of the participants are new drivers. With the proposed railway route many of these students would need to cross the tracks more than once to get home. Multiple rail crossings at night involving long high speed trains and inexperienced drivers can only be described as a tragedy waiting to happen. Even if most of the road crossings are converted to overpasses or underpasses the safety of our students will be lessened. Roads in Wisconsin are slippery in the winter. Young drivers frequently lose control of their vehicles and slide off of the road. Normally no one is injured but a slide from an overpass or into the wall of an underpass could easily be fatal.

Agriculture education, as defined by law, consists of classroom education, FFA and a supervised agricultural experience (SAE). Many SAEs involve working with large animals. Large animals are often spooked by loud noises such as those coming from a major rail line. A spooked animal is a dangerous animal and a cow or steer weighing over 1000 pounds could easily injure or kill its student handler. Other SAEs have students operating and driving machinery on their own families' farms. Operating near tracks with farm machinery, driving across tracks with machinery and becoming distracted by a large train are all risks that our agriculture students would be exposed to. This would be especially true on the large number of farms divided into multiple parcels of land by the proposed route.

These are only the hazards unique to our students. They and everyone else in the area would be put at risk in other ways. Derailments happen every week in this country. It has not been disclosed what types of possibly toxic materials will be carried at high speeds near our schools. Response time for our emergency services could be increased dramatically as ambulances, county sheriff's cars and fire trucks are forced to either wait or take alternate routes. Additionally Clinton is served by volunteer fire fighters and EMTs. They need to race to the fire station when called. This would also be slowed by GLBT and add to emergency response times.

Funding of rural schools has become a major problem in Wisconsin. Approval of GLBT, as proposed, would devastate the finances of the Clinton school district. The land that GLBT wishes to confiscate from taxpaying citizens would no longer be subject to local property taxes. By itself that is a moderate loss to the schools. Unfortunately that is not where the real damage would come from. The property value of farms split into smaller parcels by a new set of railway tracks would decrease dramatically. It is doubtful that a single farmer in the area would accept the seemingly generous offer of \$20,000 per acre that GLBT has publically announced. Much land would no longer be able to be farmed using large modern machinery. Farmers who currently grow crops on these parcels would be forced to sell their land at depressed prices or to buy smaller less efficient machinery in addition to what they already own. The assessed value of land will drop. Also homes near the tracks would be unsellable except at rock bottom prices. Their assessed value would drop greatly, yet GLBT apparently has no plans to reimburse these people for their losses. Tax rates for everyone would increase, harming even those people who do not live near the GLBT route. Higher taxes and lower profitability could even force many farmers and homeowners off of their land or into bankruptcy. Even a rise in tax rates enough to cause these calamities would not be enough to completely make up for loss in income due to depressed property valuations. Approval of GLBT would deprive Clinton area students of their right to an education as good as that of their neighbors a few miles away.

Thank you for taking the time to read our concerns. We trust that the Surface Transportation Board Office of Environmental Analysis will reach the correct conclusion and put the needs of students and the citizens of south central Wisconsin above the desire of Mr. Patton and his investors to make a profit.

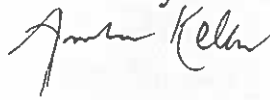
Josh Jones
President



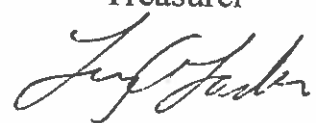
Loren Bobolz
Vice President



Amber Keller
Secretary



Larry Lader
Treasurer



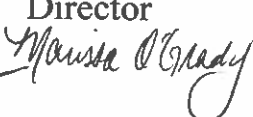
Kathleen Clothier
Director



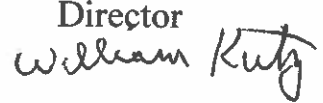
Gary Sommers
Director



Marissa O'Grady
Director



Bill Kutz
Director



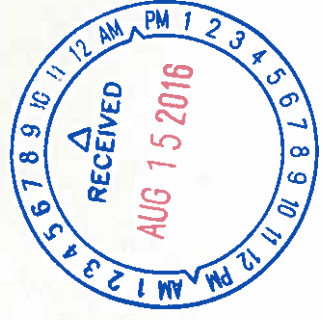
Cc: Congressman Paul Ryan

Clinton FFA Alumni
Larry Lader
PO Box 69
Avalon, WI 53505

MILWAUKEE WI 530
18 MAY 2016 PM 1 L



Dave Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
Docket No. FD 35952
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001



20423-0001

