



City of Aurora

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Thomas J. Weisner

Mayor

Thursday, February 14, 2008

The Honorable Anne K. Quinlan
Acting Secretary
Surface Transportation Board
395 E. Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

Re: Surface Transportation Board (STB) Docket No. FD 35087 Canadian National (CN) Railway Company and Grand Trunk Corporation's Acquisition of Control of the Elgin Joliet and Eastern Railway (EJ&E) West Company/Scope of Study for the Environmental Impact Study (EIS)

Dear Ms. Quinlan:

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the proposed scope of study for the EIS for the proposed acquisition of the EJ&E West Company by the CN Railway Company.

The City of Aurora is very concerned about the proposed acquisition and the resulting adverse impacts on our transportation system, environment, economy, public safety, and quality of life. The City respectfully requests that the STB ensures the scope is fully developed, investigated, and addressed within the EIS.

The City believes the CN's use of a three to four-year period of train traffic projections is not adequate. We suggest that the scope of the EIS include a 20-year planning horizon to coincide with the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan for the region. Also, given the complexity of issues typically discussed in an EIS report, we suggest the response time be extended to a 90-, 120- or 180-day comment period.

In addition, the City suggests the sites selected for the next round of public hearings have a better geographic representation of the affected area. As such, we believe that a public hearing should be scheduled in the Aurora/Naperville area. Since the City of Aurora has the largest population of any of the cities directly affected by the proposed project, this is an ideal location for a meeting.

We suggest that the scope of the EIS include the following issues of critical importance to the City and its residents:

Evaluation of Alternative Railroad Corridors/Routes

The scope should consider the acquisition costs and environmental impacts associated with acquisition of other railroad lines. Given the density of Aurora and the other communities that surround the EJ&E line, the scope should evaluate the feasibility of acquiring other railroad lines that would impact less populated areas and serve as a better long-term solution to Chicago area rail congestion.

Impact on Roadway System Capacity Given Future Population and Job Growth.

The scope should analyze capacity of the roadway system on a local and regional-level, including impacts on crossings. Issues to be evaluated include level of service, traffic delays, increased risk level for vehicle accidents, and increased traffic levels.

Impact on the Proposed Metra Suburban Transit Access Route (STAR) Line.

The STAR Line corridor will provide north-south commuter service among Cook, DuPage, and Will Counties. When the project is completed, it will become the first commuter rail line in northeastern Illinois to address suburb-to-suburb commutes. As such, it is imperative that Metra is permitted to use the EJ&E corridor. The scope should discuss the viability, associated costs, and impacts on overpasses, underpasses, and at-grade crossings.

Impact on Transportation to/from Schools.

The scope should address safety risks at crossings for pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles (including autos and buses), as well as impacts on travel times.

Impact on Existing and Proposed Quiet Zones.

The City has invested considerable time and expenses to ensure that quiet zones are established in 2008. The City wants assurance that the quiet zones will remain in place in perpetuity, to reduce the duration of train horn sound levels in our community.

Impact to Flora and Fauna.

The scope should discuss proximity and impact to nearby wetlands and forests, and include recognizing that the corridor has become a greenbelt and migratory path for numerous species of wildlife, the scope should include short and long-term effects on these species, including those that may be rare or threatened.

Impact on Air Quality.

The scope should include evaluation of air quality, including emission impacts under scenarios of various volumes of freight traffic, availability of mass transit, and vehicle usage.

Impact of Increased Transport of Hazardous Materials.

The scope should address impacts of the response time to hazardous material spills and the financial impact on emergency service preparation, especially since it is estimated that transportation of hazardous materials on the DuPage County segments of the EJ&E may increase more than ten-fold.

Financial Impact on Small and Large Businesses.

The scope should analyze the financial impacts to small and large businesses. The impacts to small businesses, especially those which will be affected by increased travel times like food delivery services/restaurants, florists, etc. should be evaluated. Also, large businesses, especially those in the Meridian Business Park and Meadow Lakes area, which will be affected by increased travel times and limited access should be evaluated.

Financial Impact on Communities

The scope should address the long-term financial impacts to each affected community, since many will have no associated benefits and yet be burdened by significant project costs.

Impact on Emergency Service Response.

The scope should include discussion about the impact on fire stations and hospitals. This is especially critical given the close proximity of Rush Copley Memorial Hospital on Ogden Avenue in Aurora and Edward Hospital on 127th Street in Plainfield.

Impact of Increased Noise and Vibration.

The scope should provide for a noise and vibration study of the affected residential and commercial areas, including impacts on Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

Impact to Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities.

The scope should analyze impacts and propose connectivity solutions to support the numerous bicycle/pedestrian facilities along this corridor. These facilities are used by more than 300,000 people every year and represent one of the most popular recreational assets of our region. Paths impacted include the Illinois Prairie Path Aurora Branch, Illinois Prairie Path Batavia Branch, Virgil Gilman Trail, and the Southern DuPage County Bike Trail.

We look forward to working with your organization throughout the EIS and STB approval process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Tom Weisner", written over a horizontal line.

Mayor Thomas J. Weisner
City of Aurora

TW/rk/ce