

Seeing the proposal for the new rail line through southern Porter County caused me to think deeply about the impact that this proposal would have on local government. With my unique perspective as an assessor-appraiser, I am naturally drawn to the impact that this proposed rail line will have on assessed valuation in Porter County.

That being said, a proposed rail line in southern Porter County will have a negative impact upon the assessed valuation within the county. In other words, simply having the rail line run through southern Porter County will decrease the total assessed valuation for the county, thereby increasing the burden upon the remaining taxpayers, such as homeowners and small business owners. There are (4) reasons I believe this to be true.

First, the property of the railroad itself is assessed by the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance, and NOT the local assessor. While advocating for the taxpayers in relation to the new Porter Regional Hospital, the state of Indiana attempted to direct an assessment of the facility at a value much less than its true market value. Downstate lobbyists continue to convince the Legislature to take more control of your local assessor's duties. The state now assesses steel mills, local utilities and railroads. The assessor has no legitimate way to appeal the state's assessment of these facilities.

Second, the personal property of railroads, including rail cars, inventory, engines, and the like, are captured by the Indiana Department of Revenue into the Commuter/Electric Rail Service Fund, and this money DOES NOT go to local government to pay for schools, police, fire, and other necessary services. This money goes to pay for rail-related functions only, in a similar way that the money from a tax increment finance district does, in the sense that this revenue does not go to pay the costs of local government; rather, a railroad's tax dollars only go to pay for self-serving interests of the railroad itself.

Third, the imposition of the rail line in southern Porter County will have an adverse impact on the assessed value of surrounding properties. Prospective purchasers of real estate will obviously pay less for property adjacent to a noisy freight line. When property becomes worthless, its assessed valuation is less, and therefore increases the tax burden on the remaining property owners.

Fourth, a rail line in southern Porter County will thwart development in the southern two (2) quadrants of Porter County. Inhibiting development will devalue the assessed valuation of Porter County.

For these reasons, I am strongly opposed to the imposition of the rail line in southern Porter County. We have to plan responsibly for the future growth and development of our county, and this rail line is an obstacle to both progress and growth.

Jon Snyder

Porter County Assessor