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February 15, 2008

Anne K. Quinlan
Acting Secretary
Surface Transportation Board
Office of the Secretary
395 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20423

Dear Ms. Quinlan:

I am writing to express my serious concerns about the impact in Illinois of CN's proposed acquisition of the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway (EJ&E). The proposed sale would have serious implications for Amtrak service in Illinois, the communities along the EJ&E and the proposed Metra New Starts project, the STAR Line. I urge the Surface Transportation Board to expand the scope of its environmental analysis to include the sale's impact on each.

First, consider the impact on Amtrak service. If CN purchases the EJ&E railroad with no conditions, the transaction would effectively eliminate a CN rail line critical to the operation of six daily Amtrak trains. This would put at serious risk Amtrak service to Champaign and Carbondale.

Last year, those routes had the greatest increase in ridership of any Amtrak route in the national system -- a 67.4 percent increase. Compromising these routes would almost certainly jeopardize further Amtrak expansion in Illinois and devastate the Illinois communities along the routes. I am particularly concerned about the impact on Champaign and Carbondale, the two most popular stations along the affected Amtrak routes. The STB should conduct public hearings in the cities along the affected routes to examine the economic loss this essential rail service would have on those communities.

There is a way to minimize the risk to current Amtrak service. Building a new connection between the CN and the Norfolk Southern Railroad at Grand Crossing (near 75th St. in Chicago) would protect Amtrak's southern routes and improve the on-time performance of Amtrak trains. To date, however, CN has declined to make any commitment to this project and has instead left Amtrak's future operations in question.

A second impact to consider is pedestrian and passenger safety. CN's heavier use of the EJ&E would mean many more at-grade crossings and freight train back-ups in the communities along the rail line. Each year in Illinois, at least 50 people are killed and another 50 are injured in rail grade crossing collisions. Increased crossings also would

contribute to local congestion, pollution and emergency response times in many communities. The STB's analysis should include the acquisition's impact on safety, congestion and environmental impact in communities along the rail line.

Lastly, the proposed acquisition raises many questions about the future of Metra's STAR Line New Start project. The proposed STAR Line would serve as Metra's first suburb-to-suburb line. The 55-mile route would utilize a corridor running approximately 36 miles along the EJ&E railroad. The increased freight along this track would likely require Metra to build additional track to operate commuter trains. The STB should require Metra and CN to provide an accounting of the increased costs to the STAR Line as part of any environmental analysis.

Chicago remains the busiest rail gateway in the United States, accounting for one-third of the nation's freight rail traffic. CN's greater use of EJ&E could significantly relieve rail congestion in Northeastern Illinois. Utilizing underused track like the EJ&E would allow goods to move through Illinois quicker and help maintain Chicago's title as the undisputed rail hub of the country.

The STB, however, should not grant those potential benefits at the expense of Amtrak riders and the communities affected by this acquisition. I strongly encourage the STB to take these concerns into account as you undertake your environmental analysis.

Sincerely,

Dick Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator

Surface Transportation Board
CN-EJ&E EIS - FD-35087

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