

13431 Lakeshore Drive
Plainfield, IL 60585
September 11, 2008

Phillis Johnson-Ball
STB Finance Docket No. 35087
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Dear Ms. Johnson-Ball,

The structure of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Canadian National Railway Company Acquisition of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway Company shows that serious attempts were made to analyze the issues that arise with this particular "minor transaction."

Unfortunately, this particular acquisition by the Canadian National Railway Company will have a MAJOR impact on the quality of life of residents in the towns along the current EJ&E rail lines because of the very significant increase in the number AND length of the freight trains rolling along the tracks. The impact of the increases will be felt also by the substantial number of commuters from towns west of the EJ&E tracks that must pass through at-grade crossings in order to reach the commuter expressways serving the Chicago metropolitan region.

Plainfield, where I live and serve as Village Trustee, and the surrounding towns have experienced explosive population growth in recent years. As a result, massive improvements to the regional road systems are already overdue because the funds are just not available to handle the sorely needed projects, particularly at a time when road construction materials are soaring in cost. With so many at-grade EJ&E crossings, 16 alone in Plainfield, a significant decrease in the amount of time cars can move over the tracks compounds an already serious problem.

Considering the current situation, it is vitally important that several important at-grade crossing be converted to above grade crossing to facilitate the efficient movement of residents and emergency response teams throughout the region.

Because of their origins as school districts for farming communities, our educational districts cover many square miles and bus a very large portion of the students to schools. For example, the Plainfield School District currently has more than 300 buses in use and expects to have 400 in service before long. Considering that buses must stop at every at-grade crossing and adding on delays of up to 5 minutes every time a train is present, it is easy to understand our regional traffic problems will only get a lot worse if this acquisition goes through without serious mitigation efforts.

In my opinion, while the EIS format was reasonably comprehensive, it was flawed by the use of inaccurate information. Our traffic counts are much higher than those used in the EIS. Also, major plans for future road infrastructure improvements were not considered. For example, in Plainfield, the EIS mentions that 135th street will require mitigation because cars could back up onto Route 30 when the gates are down at the at-grade crossing. This is certainly a problem, but we have other situations where the problem is or will be more severe. Among these are the at-grade crossings at Route 126 and in particular, 143rd street which is slated to be a major east-west conduit for traffic through Plainfield.

There is considerable information available to project the severity of the problem. For example, according to the state representative serving the area, Des Plaines has three Class 1 railroads passing through town and most crossings are at-grade. In her comments at the Sept. 9th Transportation Committee hearing on H.R. 6707, the "Taking Responsible Action for Community Safety Act" she noted that rail traffic made it practically impossible to move around town. In addition, she indicated that they have been unsuccessfully seeking mitigation help for almost 20 years. My guess is that the towns along the EJ&E line will see the same result if mitigation is not required as part of the agreement.

Looking toward the future, I believe that high fuel costs will force freight movement to the railroads and away from the interstate trucks. While it may not quite take us back to Chicago's dynamic growth era when railroads replaced water and horse drawn carts as a way to efficiently move people and freight, it is clear that railroads have a bright future in moving people and freight.

Toward this end, it is important that the Chicago area embrace railroad growth. This is why the Star line is important to the western Chicago suburbs as it will provide a non-car based way to move people efficiently around our area. With soaring fuel costs, this will be really important as families struggle to balance their personal budgets. Unfortunately, CN purchase of EJ&E tracks without their firm commitment to the Star Line will make it extremely difficult to create this essential service that could benefit the area for generations.

Railroad freight traffic will definitely increase in the future I envision. Apparently transportation experts agree as some project a 100% increase over current railroad freight levels by 2020. The real environmental impact that needs to be assessed is how to accommodate this type of increase without devastating our communities. In solving this longer range problem, the CN acquisition of EJ&E is a minor step toward the needed increase in the railroads ability to move 100% more freight efficiently. What is needed is to realistically pursue the aims of CREATE that has the potential to provide the rail infrastructure that will be needed to move massive amounts of freight efficiently when high fuel costs alter the American tradition of using cars and trucks for almost all of our transportation needs.

In summary, I believe the Surface Transportation Board needs to make sure that the Environmental Impact Statement is based on the best available information. Based on what I have seen and heard, many of the facts needed for a truly comprehensive EIS have been provided with the unprecedented expression of public interest in the CN acquisition of EJ&E. My hope is that the STB will carefully integrate this input into a true assessment of the MAJOR impact that this "minor transaction" will have on our communities.

Let's take advantage of the aroused public interest to make real progress on moving people by rail (e.g., Star Line) and work together toward a real way to handle the anticipated major growth of freight traveling by rail through the Chicago area.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Lamb".

Bill Lamb
Village of Plainfield Trustee