

EJ&E Statement September 8, 2008

As one who has long favored by-passing of Chicago by through freight, freight that neither originates nor terminates here, I am in favor of increased use of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern for that purpose. Maybe that means the sale to the Canadian National or some other line and maybe not. I do think CN has badly botched its proposed purchase by not addressing the concerns generated by the prospect of some twenty long freight trains a day tying up towns including emergency vehicles. Pleas of efficiency fall on deaf ears when that means waiting for long trains to pass, trains likely carrying freight for destinations several hundred miles away.

The railroad might claim it was there first. The towns, in turn, might claim adverse possession, that they have customarily used the crossings for over twenty-one years. CN might have some Machiavellian tough cop/nice cop ploy in mind, but, otherwise, it has stirred up a lot of unnecessary opposition and in affluent, well connected towns. I am not familiar with the EJ&E property, but CN could have proposed to separate some thirteen crossings, which, I hear, would have largely alleviated the problem. Proposing that now would not likely mollify the opposition or salvage CN's credibility, but better late than never.

Heavy freight use is not compatible with commuter trains running on a twenty minute frequency, as Metra proposes for the STAR line. There is very heavy freight traffic on two Metra lines, but not in the rush period, when freight service is largely suspended. The two functions require separate rights-of-way. Not, however, that the STAR line is the best answer to the public transportation problem. The west of O'Hare area has about the same half million workers every day as downtown Chicago, but spread over at least ten times the land area. Construction of a rail line in an expressway obviously not designed for it would be expensive and disruptive. There is precious little employment within walking distance of the expressway. Rubber tire delivery will be necessary in any event. It might as well be from the near-by Northwest commuter line, if rail transit is constructed.

Some form of Bus Rapid Transit would be much more appropriate. We have had van pools for some two decades. We could have bus pools ten times as big. We could put the rapid in Bus Rapid Transit with a monorail technology that propels, suspends, and brakes the vehicle under a standard steel beam with a Linear Induction Motor. Such a system could be an air rights proposition, routed over existing roads and rail lines, parking lots, or open fields with little or no disruption to near-by activities. The vehicle need only be a skid that the bus drives on and off. The stations need be little more than bus turnarounds every five miles or so, whose location is not critical. It is some thirty-five miles as the crow flies from the great employment center in the northwest suburbs to the great unemployment center in the southern suburbs. Such a technology could make door-to-door single seat trips of barely an hour possible.

A CN purchase of the EJ&E will likely make the former Grand Trunk Western tracks in the city redundant. If so, the Metra Southwest Service might be rerouted over them, saving some four hundred million in bridgework and making possible a connection with the CTA Midway line.

The existing routes should remain intact. They might be needed again. In this day and age of expanding traffic it is foolish to abandon rail capacity. It is another subject, but I do not support the City's development plans that they interfere with.