

EI-22975



Surface Transportation Board Docket No. FD 359 52

czerbsbarth

to:

David.Navecky

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Hide Details

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Mr. Dave Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
Docket No. FD 35952
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001
May 23, 2016

Re: Docket No. FD 35952 Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc.

Dear Mr. Navecky:

I am contacting you today to voice my opposition to the proposed route of the Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. high speed rail line (hereinafter GLB). I am also seeking your assistance with finding a way to make sure that pertinent concerns regarding issues including, but not limited to drainage, water quality, traffic, access to emergency services and decreases to property value are carefully considered before the construction of this rail line is approved.

Before a project of this magnitude begins, it seems reasonable to first determine whether it is necessary, not just potentially useful, but necessary. According the GLB website (www.greatlakesbasin.net) the project "would provide additional capacity by giving the Class 1 railroads an alternate route for the 15-to-25% of current Chicago rail traffic that does not need to go into the terminal for sorting or delivery." A further discussion of the project features includes sections on revenue and safety. Under revenue, GLB states that the project would "create more revenue opportunities for the Class 1 railroads."

GLB claims that the Class 1 railroads can make money from this project. If that is the true, why aren't the Class 1 railroads supporting this project. Maybe they aren't supporting this project because they have their own routes to maintain and modernize and they don't need or want to spend money on infrastructure that they don't control. Does it really make sense? GLB is a rail line not a railroad. It cannot guarantee that any railroad will use these tracks.

But a section of the project that GLB wants you to approve gives GLB a revenue source even if no one uses the rails. I am referring to the revenue opportunity for GLB where "50 feet of the 200-foot GLB right of way would be reserved for possible use by utilities as a new right of way to serve potential future population growth of the region. This is another potential source of revenue for GLB."

This part of the project is troubling for at least two reasons. First, the acquisition of land strictly for a utility right of way seems to be beyond the mandate of your office. It is not appropriate for GLB to piggyback this acquisition with the acquisition of properties for rail purposes and as such should not be included as part of this project. Second, given that GLB "is designed to bypass populated areas, . . . (and) avoid attracting more residences or businesses that would limit expansion or be exposed in case of an incident" there seems little potential for future population growth in the area around the proposed route.

Pardon me for being blunt, but it sounds like those of us who don't live in "populated areas" are being asked to solve the traffic congestion and safety problems of larger population centers. All GLB is doing is moving the problems from an urban community to a rural one and it is not offering any safety features other than those that Federal regulations already require Class 1 railroads to implement for their existing rail lines.

If I understand your mission correctly, you must conclude that this project is beneficial for the public. If the Class 1 railroads do not use the rail line the rail traffic will continue to flow through the areas where those railroads own and operate track. The urban areas will not benefit from the GLB line. The non-populated areas will certainly not get a benefit from the rail line. My neighbors will have their farms divided into parcels that decrease their ability to work the land effectively and will have fewer acres to work which decreases the income to our county. GLB says there will be jobs from the rail line, but that is dependent on business that GLB does not have and does not address the decrease in agricultural production. Furthermore, if you look at the proposed route carefully you will see that it runs roughly parallel to sections of Rock Creek

through Kankakee County. In recent years we have seen significant water levels in the creek both from local storms and from run-off coming down from storms near Monee. The route chosen by GLB crosses 7940 North Road at approximately 4000 West. (see GLB scoping map 5 point 76 for details) If this section of road is closed due to construction of the rail line or, later, due to 110 trains crossing the double or triple section of high speed rail daily at roughly one every 13 minutes, those of us who live east of that crossing will only have one way in or out of our homes. Most residents who live on 7940 North Road live west of Rock Creek but east of the proposed crossing. So when the creek floods again, and it will, we really won't have a reliable way out and emergency services won't have a good way in either. And if we do get across the tracks at 7940N we must cross again either at 9000N or 5000W just to go to town. Even the farmers have to get to town and many of us, myself included, work in town. We have reliable access now, but that won't be true after GLB gets done. And my neighbors and I aren't the only ones that will have to deal with this type of problem.

Please review the details displayed on point 74 of scoping map 5. The proposed route makes it completely impossible for the residents who live south of that crossing to enter or exit without crossing the GLB grade level track. While the map seems to show a roadway to the southeast of the residences, there is no road and no bridge over the creek. I have lived here for 10 years and there has been no road or bridge during that time. Is GLB putting one in? Who pays for that? Is that expense in the public good? I will be happy to provide pictures of the actual site. GLB did not even provide you with accurate data about the conditions of the proposed route. Why should we believe that their other data is any more accurate.

I see a company trying to move rail traffic into rural areas to alleviate suburban congestion and speed up rail service. I don't see any attempt to talk about the environmental impact inherent in the construction and operation of a high speed rail line beyond the self-serving need to avoid areas like wetlands and cemeteries. This company talks about keeping traffic moving but does not talk about what the rail service will do to the people, livestock, wildlife and waterways that are along the proposed route especially in those areas where no overpasses or underpasses are planned. The proposed route bisects a State Park (see GLB scoping map 5 at 79) and runs dangerously close to a youth camp (see GLB scoping map 5 between 77 and 78). This negatively impacts not only local residents but visitors to the our community too.

The company purports to being "committed to being a good neighbor and a positive contributor to the economy of the counties on its route." Unfortunately this statement conflicts with GLB's apparent inability to recognize that this area is the home of a diverse population with unique needs. And if GLB's goal is to "avoid attracting more residences or businesses that would limit expansion or be exposed in case of an incident" then it does seem to admit that there are dangers to having a rail line as a neighbor. It also suggests that we should be concerned about the limits this rail line places on the future growth of our community rather than believing that the rail line will provide economic growth.

Please don't let GLB take away our ability to continue to be a viable part of our community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I hope that you can help us ensure that all needs are considered before this project becomes final.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Zerbs-Barth

/cz