

CN Acquisition of EJ&EW

The proposed acquisition of the EJ&EW and rerouting of CN system traffic could be good for the purpose of reducing rail improving transit time through the Chicago area with some infrastructure improvements. This improves the CN's competitive position most with highway carriers encouraging inherently more fuel efficient and lower emission freight transportation through market forces. Rerouting CN traffic also benefits other railroads by reducing delays from conflicting train movements.

Faced with prospects for growth, the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE) solutions for traditional CN routes through Chicago appear to be inadequate, given the desire for the alternative of the EJ&EW.

- With all major railroads experiencing significant traffic increases, current rail capacity through Chicago already is taxed.
- Only current points of congestions seem to be addressed with little apparent regard for organizing orderly traffic lanes between carriers.
- Removing CN traffic from traditional routes through Chicago offers other carriers increased capacity.

The CN Wisconsin and Iowa lines have grade-separated crossings of the UP Transcontinental Line at Elmhurst and River Forest. A new overpass for the EJ&EW over the UP at West Chicago would compensate for the existing facilities. A new EJ&EW overpass would allow crossing elimination and minor alignment changes to ease speed restrictions for Metra and UP.

The CN Southern/Gulf Coast (former IC Mainline) Line has grade-separated crossings of NS and CSX in the City; but the Eastern/Grand Trunk Line crosses these lines at grade at South Bend and Wellsboro. The EJ&EW route to Kirk Yard bridges the NS and CSX and goes under the South Shore in Gary.

Using the EJ&EW would move the CN-Eastern and UP (former MP & CSX Southwest Corridor) crossing from Thornton to Chicago.

If the CN simply paid EJ&EW for trackage rights and quietly ramped up the number of trains, we might not be having the discussions about impacts from the NIMBY's. Interestingly, the EJ&E passes by substantial forest preserve lands in the Northwest Suburbs that reduces the amount of residential impact despite the longer distances for some traffic. Conversely, people living along the current CN routes through more populous areas will be relieved by the diversion.

Nevertheless, there will be consequences and legitimate public concerns with the increased use of the EJ&EW.

- Increased rail traffic will exacerbate growing road traffic at crossings, requiring a public-private partnership in grade crossing improvements or elimination with grade separations as needed for safety and for reduced driving delays, fuel consumption, and emissions. Road traffic has increased as well since the EJ&E was originally built.

- Grade separations likely will entail some residential and commercial dislocation for the greater good.
- With the exception of the UP West Line at West Chicago, the anticipated CN freight traffic levels on the EJ&EW should pose no serious threat to reliable Metra services at at-grade rail crossings at East Joliet (RID), Spaulding (MDW), and Barrington (UPNW). The already heavy volume of UP West freight traffic makes conflict between Metra and CN at West Chicago highly probable without a grade separation.
- The addition of STAR service along the EJ&EW will raise traffic to levels that will lead to significant interference and delay without grade separation; but such future development should not prejudice the current CN application.
- The increased freight traffic on the EJ&EW will bring a need for more costly capacity improvements for that leg of the proposed Suburban Transit Access Route (STAR). While excess capacity will not be available for exploitation, the strategic need for a north-south regional transit corridor route far outweighs the costs for additional tracks.

Additional consequences and public concerns arise for portions of existing CN routes losing most, if not all, freight traffic and becoming candidates for downgrading or abandonment. These passenger services depend on shared, avoidable, costs for track, signal, and bridge maintenance to hold down operating expenses reflected in the contractual use charges. This presents crises for Federal and State funding and for routing decisions that may take a few years to resolve.

Current and proposed Amtrak services would be impacted.

- Existing Carbondale, IL and New Orleans, LA services could be expanded in the future.
- Rockford, IL and Dubuque, IA study completed and awaiting State funding.
- Decatur and Springfield, IL study recently completed and awaiting State funding.

The Metra North Central service could be affected between Leighton (Mundelein) and Franklin Park.

The abandonment of the CN Iowa line from Canal Street on the west to McCormick Place on the east and from the connection to the UP (St. Charles Air Line) would be an irreparable transportation asset loss for the Chicago Region.

- Severs the existing Amtrak service that has no immediate alternative. The CREATE proposal for a Grand Crossing connection would take at least three years to complete.
- Offers opportunity to extend Metra service from Union Station to connect with the Metra Electric and Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District South Shore to improve regional coordination with relatively inexpensive betterments. The proposed service facilitates commuting from the high unemployment Southlands to job-rich northern and western suburbs with a convenient transfer.
- Provides opportunity for future services and improved access from the Southlands and McCormick Place to O'Hare and Midway airports.

- Allows limited weekend and emergency diversion of services to either Union or LaSalle station.
- Requires costly new underground connection to achieve the same regional coordination that would take more than five years to implement and a hundred times the cost.

Surface Transportation Board

CN-EI&E EIS - FD-35087

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