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August 6, 2008

Congressman Jim Oberstar – (fax two offices)
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Dear Congressman Oberstar:

I recognize you have a lot of citizen voters to answer to, but I do believe the issues over the CN/EJ&E are over blown. I have written to several papers regarding this transaction painting a more positive position than what I have read in the press. I applaud you for the statement of saying, "the research was incomplete" in the article I read today. I have attended several of the town hall variety meetings and mostly observed as the many erroneous statements are made that has riled up the crowd. I believe the talk of people dieing in ambulances and the other side of town burning down because fire trucks are all stopped for hours by the trains is like screaming fire in a theater. It sounds good at a rally, but in reality, those issues would be very small.

Trains, even long ones, cross intersections rather quickly. You only need to go to the towns along the UP or BNSF lines in the western suburbs to observe this. It is interesting to see people rush to beat a train to a crossing, only to sit quietly at a stoplight a block away. The light is red for 1-2 minutes while a train is generally only in the crossing for no more than 4 minutes. Speaking of stoplights, we have them everywhere in the suburbs. At one to two minutes on each red cycle, everyone seems to be OK with this and in most places where there is an overpass, there seems to be a traffic signal at the end of each one of these. Still, you can sit at the signal for 2 minutes before the over/underpass, but be irate at waiting for 3-4 minutes for the actual train. Pretty silly, I think.

I live in Geneva, IL. We have a couple over/underpasses, but also grade several crossings. The UP runs probably 125 trains each day on this line, 5 times the number CN will run and yet, we all survive very well. So does, West Chicago, Winfield, Glen Ellyn, Wheaton, Villa Park and Elmhurst who not only have more people, but fewer over/under passes. I assume you have held conversations with the city officials from many of those suburbs and while I am sure you have heard stories about sitting trains, overall I would guess they are not overly unhappy. I would ask you verify with those suburbs how they have handled the train traffic and while I agree it is not popular, it is certainly workable.

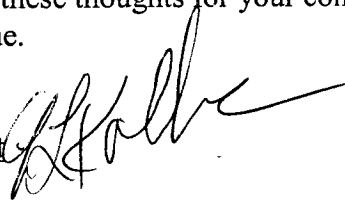
Ironically, a front-page article today in the same Tribune today highlighted all the billions of \$\$\$ caused by traffic congestion and the need for more mass transit. The prospect of each train that CN can run on the rails versus that same traffic moving via highway through Chicago is equivalent to 400 trucks on the highway. Yes, the trains CN is going to move via EJ&E is mostly existing traffic, the growth in freight in the US over the next 20 years is staggering in it's volume and what it will do to tax our infrastructure is extreme.

I know the STAR line is a consideration as well, but the ability of passenger revenue to sustain any potential for profitability would be greatly enhanced with a good freight system providing much of the track maintenance and upgrade costs. If the passenger revenue cannot cover more than half the cost of operating existing commuter trains from the suburbs to/from Chicago, how will it ever justify the STAR line with most of it's passengers only going to O'Hare.

Yes, I am a retired Railroad Sales & Marketing guy, but strongly believe in the railroad's (collective) ability to assist in the highway congestion situation over the coming years. There is "no good economical location" to build railroads so the capacity we have must be utilized. With our constant and growing needs for "social" spending of our tax dollars, where will the money for infrastructure come from to build new highways, etc. to handle our consumer needs if we handicap our present railroad's ability to help.

I respectfully submit these thoughts for your consideration as you finalize your position on the CN/EJ&E issue.

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