



CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

January 31, 2008

Victoria J. Ruston, Esq. Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, S.W., Room 1106
Washington, D.C. 2003

RE: Canadian National Railway Corporation and Grand Trunk Corporation – Control – EJ&E West Company (STB Finance Docket No. 35087)

Dear Ms. Rustov:

The Champaign County Regional Planning Commission has gone on record with its concern for the potential impact on Amtrak's passenger rail service of CN Rwy.'s proposed operating plan pursuant to its control of the EJ&E Railway.

In 2007 136,326 passengers boarded or detrained at the Amtrak station in Champaign, Illinois. An additional 1,964 passengers were handled at the station in Rantoul, Illinois. This represents an increase of 47% and 76.8% respectively from the previous year due, in large part, to addition of a third service on the "Illini" corridor, the Saluki (Amtrak trains 390/391). This dramatic increase follows on years of steady increases. Between 2004 and 2006 passenger totals increased 18.7% at Champaign and 4.6% at Rantoul.

Amtrak provides an extremely important service to Champaign and surrounding counties and to the University of Illinois. Amtrak provides approximately 8% of all intercity public transport departures from Champaign County and about 15% of departures to Chicago destinations. In some city-pairs Amtrak provides the only direct service (although some destination can be reached by connecting air or bus services) including Centralia, IL; DuQuoin, IL; Gilman, IL; Homewood, IL; Fulton, KY and points south including Memphis and New Orleans.

Any serious impairment or discontinuation of Amtrak service would be of great consequence. Elimination of Amtrak service would cut departures to Chicago by 75% from Carbondale, 50% from Effingham, and 50% from Mattoon. Amtrak is the sole provider of public transportation to Gilman, IL. In many communities discontinuance of Amtrak service would eliminate all competition leaving a single private bus company to provide inter-city service.

The steady and rapid growth of local Amtrak use demonstrates an existing and growing demand for alternatives to travel by automobile. This trend will only strengthen as the cost of driving increases, congestion grows (particularly in Chicago) and the population continues to age. The environmental benefits of rail transit are well documented. Market conditions are now providing for the realization of those benefits.

The potential impairment or elimination of Amtrak service on the Illini corridor resulting from downgrading or abandonment of the Illinois Central mainline north of Harvey, IL, would forestall the v.

potential benefits from the increasing use of public transport and would create severe problems for smaller and lower income communities.

We urge that the potential impact on specific service between city-pairs served by Amtrak be fully explored in the Environmental Impact Statement for this proceeding. This should take into account the demographic profile of each affected community (including surrounding areas) and the availability or lack thereof of alternative public transportation.

We look forward to reviewing draft materials as this process moves forward and hope that our comments will prove constructive in reaching a sound decision in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank DiNovo', followed by a horizontal line.

Frank DiNovo
Director, Planning and Community Development.