

Comments Regarding STB Finance Docket No. 35087

The acquisition of the EJ&E Railroad (EJ&E) by the Canadian National Railway (CNR) holds unwarranted potential for environmental and human disaster and should be denied by Surface Transportation Board.

To start with, the EJ&E tracks bifurcate Pratt-Wayne Woods (P-WW) Forest Preserve's numerous wetlands which provide a lush environment for egrets, great blue herons, wood ducks, beavers, coyotes, foxes, white-tailed deer, red-tailed hawks, screech owls and others. Additionally, P-WW is home to the state-endangered sandhill crane as well as several other threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Finally, more than 9 miles of trails, including a portion of the Illinois Prairie Path, run through P-WW and are used by hundreds of hikers, joggers, walkers and horseback riders on a weekly basis. Unfortunately, much of this trail network, as well as an off-leash dog area, run within yards of the EJ&E tracks and, at points, cross them at grade. Up until now, the less than 5 trains a day that EJ&E runs on these tracks has not represented much of a problem, other than noise, but this would change dramatically if CNR is allowed to acquire EJ&E.

CNR proposes to increase the traffic on the EJ&E tracks to nearly 25 trains a day. This means the animals, birds and people who depend on Pratt-Wayne Woods for recreation and a home will be put in harms way more than once an hour. It is only a matter of time before this ends with deadly results. Add to this the hundreds of vehicles daily that use the grade crossings on only this small section of EJ&E right away and the prescription for disaster becomes even more pronounced. Multiply this again by the entire length of the EJ&E system and it is clearly not in the best environmental interest of those living in the area for the STB to approve the EJ&E sale to CNR.

The Board also needs to consider the inevitable negative consequences of a 500% increase in the transportation of chemicals and other toxic materials through an environmentally sensitive zone, such as Pratt-Wayne Woods and the surrounding area. Sooner or later a leak, a spill or a derailment will create an environmental disaster that kills untold animals, birds and people as well as pollutes the wetlands and drinking water source area wells depend on.

Then there is the increased noise and vibration that those who live near the E&JE tracks will have to endure almost 25 times a day. Add to this the loss in property value residents will experience and it is more than the STB should allow. The Village of Wayne, in particular, has always been known for its bucolic nature and life style. The CNR's proposal would destroy all of this for everyone, not just those living in proximity to the EJ&E tracks!

And why must the residents of Northeast Illinois endure all of this? The Canadian National Railway would have us believe it is because by diverting its trains along the EJ&E right of way it will provide a greater benefit to the area as a whole. But that, of course, is untrue. The CNR acquisition of the EJ&E will, at best, only divert the noise, pollution and potential for disaster from one area to another. And in the EJ&E area, the risk will be amplified by the dramatic increase in the number of trains and resident unfamiliarity with safety measures and practices already known to those living where the CNR currently travels. The only real benefit in the CNR acquisition of the EJ&E Railroad is that the Canadian National Railway will substantially increase its profitability. Sadly, not even those profits will benefit the residents in the EJ&E corridor because they will be taxed back in Canada. It is for these reasons that the Surface Transportation Board must deny CNR's request to acquire EJ&E.

STB File No. _____

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DATE: 30 Jan 08