

January 30, 2008

Ms. Anne Quinlan
Acting Secretary
Surface Transportation Board
395 E. Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

Reference: Finance Docket No. 35087

Dear Ms. Quinlan:

The Near South Planning Board, a not-for-profit community-based membership organization representing the businesses, property owners and institutions on the City's near south side, recently reviewed CN's proposal to acquire the EJ&E Railroad, a proposal that would mean the removal of the freight traffic entering Chicago on CN's lines and shifting it to the EJ&E line.

As you are aware, CN trains travel on the St. Charles Airline tracks, which are elevated and extend westward at 16th Street on a berm and bridge over Indiana, Michigan, Wabash, State and Clark streets and avenues. For several years, the Near South Planning Board has recommended the elimination of the St. Charles connector and the rerouting of rail traffic. In the McCormick Place Expansion Program Recommended Transportation Plan dated June 1990, jointly prepared by the City Departments of Planning and Public Works, the Illinois Department of Transportation, and DeLeuw, Cather & Company, rerouting the St. Charles connector was strongly suggested:

"There is a developing consensus that the Air Line tracks severely restrict the potential of many parcels in the Near South area and that relocation of the railroad operations that currently use the St. Charles Air Line would be desirable." (Page 24, above cited report)

Since the closing of the R.R. Donnelley Printing Plant at Calumet Avenue and King Drive, there has not been a tremendous need for freight trains to pass through the area. In addition, congestion and infrastructure problems continue to be key issues for the railroad. As such, the Near South Planning Board is pleased to support the steps being taken by CN for the removal of freight from these tracks. However, the Near South Planning Board's primary goal remains the abandonment of the tracks.

It is this organization's contention that the St. Charles Connector forms an elevated barrier that has, to some extent, affected commercial and residential growth south from the Loop. The structure cuts through Ping Tom Park as well and affects the continued expansion of Chinatown. Eliminating this berm and the railroad overpasses would open

up the boulevards extending into our community and restore the magnificent view of our downtown skyline. The Near South Planning Board continues to reiterate its position that all traffic be rerouted and funds be used to physically eliminate the St. Charles Connector and its associated tracks and elevated structure.

Having stated that, the Near South Planning Board approves of the steps being taken by CN towards achieving that goal, and, therefore, strongly supports CN's proposed acquisition of the EJ&E line. In addition, the organization urges CN to permanently abandon the railroad right-of-way, which would allow for its reuse to benefit the community. The Near South Planning Board recognizes that it is important for Amtrak to remove its traffic from the line as well (as the next step towards abandoning the tracks) and, therefore, encourages all parties (the State of Illinois, the City of Chicago and CN) to work together towards achieving that goal.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Sanchez-Carlson
President & Executive Director

Surface Transportation Board
CN-EJ&E EIS - FD-35087
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