

HARRIS COUNTY

COMMISSIONER RODNEY ELLIS



PRECINCT ONE

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December 17, 2021

Chairman Martin Oberman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423
Submitted electronically at www.sbt.gov

RE: Comments on Docket No. FD 365000, Proposed Merger of Kansas City Southern and Canadian Pacific Railway

I am the Commissioner of Harris County Precinct 1, which includes more than 1.1 million people, living both in the city of Houston and in unincorporated Harris County.

In November 2021, my office received notice from the Surface Transportation Board of the proposed merger of Kansas City Southern (KCS) and Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) and the related Environmental Impact Statement scoping period (Docket No. FD 36500). After conducting independent research on the proposed measure and attending digital scoping sessions, Precinct 1 has developed several recommendations, discussed below.

The Harris County region is one of only two non-attainment areas along the project pathway. The County's non-attainment status and weak regulatory environment have resulted in disparate health impacts for freight-adjacent neighborhoods in Harris County. Mitigation measures such as the ones recommended in these comments should be taken to limit the negative impacts of this expansion in freight-adjacent communities and near downtown Houston.

Recommendation #1: Fuel Efficient and Low-Emission Engines

The merger of Kansas City Southern and Canadian Pacific Railway networks will result in a 13% percent increase in freight traffic through the Harris County region. According to analysis requested by Precinct 1 from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ):

“the types of locomotive engines added, the engines’ fuel usage, and whether the increased freight capacity results in increased locomotive engine usage and/or rail switchyard activity all can impact emissions.”

As such, KCS and Canadian Pacific Railways should operate fuel efficient, low-emissions locomotive engines whenever possible, especially in non-attainment areas.

Recommendation #2: Monitoring and Mitigating Negative Health Impacts

Trains traveling through the Harris County region as a result of the proposed merger will operate on Union Pacific lines. Union Pacific rail switchyard and the majority of its high-volume lines are

located in neighborhoods with high rates of asthma.¹ Due to an over-concentration of polluting industries and transit (both trains and trucking) in these areas, residents often struggle to identify the source of pollutants that exacerbate their asthma. Without the ability to identify possible sources of pollution, efforts to reduce negative health outcomes that pollution produces are often hampered. **The purchase of air monitoring hardware for community organizations active in freight adjacent communities for their own independent research and operation should accompany this merger.**

Monitoring, although critically important, should not be considered sufficient to address negative health impacts. An American Housing Survey conducted in 2015 indicated that 24% of Black children in Houston suffer from asthma - twice the rate of children of every other racial group.² Correspondingly, Black children in our region were twice as likely to visit the emergency room because of their asthma. **We recommend that a program to install HEPA filters in schools in freight adjacent communities be developed to reduce the disparate negative health outcomes of pollution in children.**

Recommendation #3: Reducing the Impact of Train Traffic on Local Commutes

Analysis conducted by the Surface Transportation Board estimates that approximately eight additional trains will pass through Houston daily as a result of the proposed merger. As mentioned by commenters during the digital comment scoping session, heavy train traffic and idling can present serious inconveniences for adjacent communities including blocking emergency routes and delaying commutes with long stop times. **Before train traffic increases, multilingual outreach should be conducted in communities with street-level rail crossings to inform them of increased traffic.** To reduce the likelihood of delaying commutes for residents of freight adjacent communities (passage at intersections can sometimes take up to 40 minutes) **increased traffic should be scheduled for off-peak hours for car, bike, and pedestrian travel.**

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rodney Ellis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rodney" and the last name "Ellis" clearly distinguishable.

Rodney Ellis,
Commissioner, Precinct 1 of Houston, TX

¹ Houston State of Health, Community Dashboard, <http://www.houstonstateofhealth.com/indicators>, Conduent Healthy Communities Institute

² Houston's Air Quality is Improving, but Asthma Disparities Persist, Kinder Institute, (Jan. 24, 2017) <https://kinder.rice.edu/2017/01/24/houstons-air-quality-is-improving-but-asthma-disparities-persist>