

January 8, 2024

The Honorable Martin J. Oberman
Chairman of the U.S. Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
January 8, 2024
Part of
Public Record

Re: Docket No. FD 36744 - CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY COMPANY AND GRAND TRUNK CORPORATION—CONTROL—IOWA NORTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY

Dear Chairman Oberman:

I'm writing as a concerned citizen to ask you and your colleagues to block the proposed acquisition of Iowa Northern Railway by Canadian National.

On December 6, 2023, the Class I railroad Canadian National announced its intent to acquire the short line railroad Iowa Northern Railway.¹ This marks the latest instance of an alarming trend. It is at least the sixth time since 2020 that a Class I operator has announced its plans to acquire a short line or regional operator.²

If allowed to proceed, this acquisition would serve to further consolidate the already-monopolized rail industry, leading to increased risks to public safety, cuts in jobs and rail service, and higher prices on everything from food to farm implements – all facilitated with the help of our own tax dollars.³

Guarding the independence of short lines is essential for rural states like Iowa. According to the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at North Dakota State University,⁴ short lines protect rural communities from experiencing “reductions in gross business volumes and personal income, increased highway investment costs, lost economic development opportunities, and reductions in property values,” all while providing “improved customer service and lower rail rates” compared to Class I railroads.

When short lines are acquired by Class I operators, it is workers, small businesses, schools, local governments, shippers such as farmers, and the public at large that are forced to suffer.

As you know, Executive Order 14036 on “Promoting Competition in the American Economy”⁵ calls for a “whole-of-government approach” to address overconcentration, monopolization, and unfair competition in the American economy.

¹ [CN to buy Iowa Northern Railway as US biofuels market booms - Supply Chain Dive](#)

² [Now in vogue: Class I railroads buying short lines and regionals - Trains](#)

³ [Regulators should derail Canadian bid for Iowa Northern Railway - Bleeding Heartland](#)

⁴ [The Importance of Short Line Railroads to Rural and Agricultural America](#)

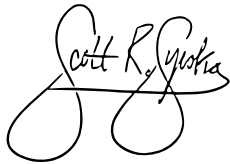
⁵ [Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy](#)

It also charges the Surface Transportation Board specifically with "...determining whether a merger, acquisition, or other transaction involving rail carriers is consistent with the public interest..."

It is my belief that losing another independent short line railroad like Iowa Northern Railway to consolidation and its consequent effects does not serve the public interest.

While this deal may help to further enrich corporate executives, financiers, and lawyers, it would come at the expense of harm to the lives of people who are too often forgotten by those in power. The everyday Iowans who would be hurt by this deal are more than numbers on a spreadsheet, and they deserve to be treated accordingly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Scott R. Syroka". The signature is stylized with large, looping letters and a horizontal line crossing through the middle.

Scott Syroka
Former City Councilmember, Johnston, IA

CC: All Parties of Record