

Finance Docket No. 35952

243659

Clarruth Seaton and Greer Barriault
PO Box 205
Shirland, Ill 61079

June 4, 2017

Chief, Section of Administration
Surface Transportation Board
Washington, D.C. 20423

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
June 5, 2017
Part of
Public Record

Re: **Finance Docket No. 35952**

We respectfully request that the Surface Transportation Board (STB) not grant approval for the GLBT Application for Authority to Construct and Operate a New Railroad Line over the proposed route. If the proposed railroad is allowed to go forward it will destroy tens of thousands of acres of productive farmland, negatively impacting the livelihood of thousands of rural families. A one-time payment to seize this land cannot possibly be equal to the current and future productivity that this land has provided for generations of farm families and all who contribute to, and benefit from, the agricultural infrastructure. Specifically, we oppose the construction for the following four reasons summarized here and detailed below.

1. The GLBT application ignores the impact on small businesses and family farms
2. The route negatively impacts the life-safety systems of small town and rural inhabitants
3. The railroad route has negative environmental and ecological effects on the potable water resources, erodible wetlands, forests and wildlife (bald and golden eagle) habitats
4. The destruction of ancient cultural artifacts and burial mounds.

First, we are concerned with GLBT's response to **Section 1150.4 (g) (2)** as it demonstrates a blatant disregard for any impact to the landowners, farms and small businesses their route will bisect.

“(g) If a new line is proposed for construction: (2) The nature or type of existing and prospective industries (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, mining, warehousing, forestry) in the area, with general information about the age, size, growth potential and projected tail use of these industries.”

GLBT Response:

“The area traversed by Great Lakes Basin's proposed line is primarily rural and agricultural. Great Lakes Basin's purpose is to construct a new line around Chicago to transport overhead traffic between its connecting lines. The GLBT preferred route is generally not adjacent to any existing industry.”

GLBT in their statement above does not recognize or address the potential impact on agricultural and rural businesses. GLBT focuses solely on the profits of moving product already serviced by existing railroads and does not consider either the potential rail transport needs of the rural and agricultural business owners or the hardships that the proposed route would place on farmers, small businesses or their employees.

We request the STB to consider the number of small businesses and family farms and the service industries which support them – that will be affected and potentially destroyed if the route is approved. The railroad is not a necessity – and profits for large businesses should not outweigh the importance of our American farmers who are each a small business employing 1000's of people over the area.

Second, the proposed GLBT route affects the life-safety systems of small towns and rural inhabitants. While GLBT has delineated principal highways and rail intersections in its application, it has not looked at rural road systems nor considered the effects the railroad will have on the access to medical, emergency and commercial services. For example, the most direct route – ***which does not flood*** – that connects Shirland, Illinois residents to emergency and medical services as well as daily necessities such as food and gasoline, will be cut off if the railroad goes through with the proposed route. These forced road closures cutting families off from their closest commercial and medical services will be perpetuated up and down the thoroughfare. The route also comes within a ½ mile of the Shirland Elementary and Middle school. Therefore, any emergency response to the school, to the town residents or those on adjacent farms will be delayed. A railroad accident or hazardous spill at this point would also directly impact the health and safety of hundreds of children.

Third, the route has environmental and ecological impacts, including the potential to contaminate the potable water resources for Shirland residents, and to destroy wetlands, forests and wildlife habitats. In 2016, GLBT altered its original route from the more straight-forward north-south plan from Wisconsin into Illinois to take a westerly detour to avoid businesses closer to the I-90 corridor. We believe if this railroad is to go through, that it should follow already established transportation corridors. This new route places the proposed crossing over the Pecatonica River at a steep grade through highly erodible wetlands that have been conservatively farmed and managed for almost 200 years, and cuts through a forest which was recently described by a retired Illinois forestry manager as ‘virgin forest, the likes of which I have not seen in close to 70 years.’ This forest is also home to both Golden and Bald eagles.

More importantly, the water table is very shallow in and around Shirland, Illinois and the residents get their drinking water from underground sources barely 5 feet deep. Any grading of the land to make the track bed will affect the water supply as well as contribute to the erosion of valuable farmland.

Fourth, ancient Native American cultural artifacts and Indian burial mounds, first identified in the 1850 and officially named the Shirland Mound Group, will be destroyed with the current proposed route through Winnebago County. In 1937, a joint archaeological expedition between the Logan Museum of Anthropology, Beloit College and the University Of Chicago Indian Museum mapped, excavated and catalogued several of the mounds.

In summary, we urge the STB to withhold approval of the GLBT Application for Authority to Construct and Operate a New Railroad Line with the proposed route.

1. It disregards the impact to small businesses and family farms
2. It has detrimental effects for the life-safety systems of rural communities
3. It shows no concern for potable water resources, farmland conservation or wildlife habitats
4. It results in the destruction of ancient cultural artifacts and burial mounds

We hope you take our concerns seriously. We strongly urge you to protect the families, farmers, small businesses, and the livelihoods of people in rural communities like Shirland, Harrison, and Rockton, Illinois that the GLBT has ignored in their proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Clarruth and Greer Barriault

Winnebago County Landowners
815-629-2362 or 713-301-0040