

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

DECISION

Docket No. FD 35522

CSX TRANSPORTATION, INC.—ACQUISITION OF OPERATING EASEMENT—GRAND
TRUNK WESTERN RAILROAD COMPANY

Digest:¹ The Board requests that CSX Transportation, Inc., establish and provide a plan detailing additional actions that the railroad will take to improve fluidity of operations and reduce the number and duration of blocked crossings on the Elsdon Line.

Decided: July 27, 2018

In 2013, the Board approved an application by CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT), to acquire an operating easement over a rail line of the Grand Trunk Western Railway Company located in the Chicago area (Elsdon Line or Line). See CSX Transp., Inc.—Acquis. of Operating Easement—Grand Trunk W. R.R., FD 35522 et al. (STB served Feb. 8, 2013). The Board reopened this proceeding on June 22, 2016, in response to a petition from communities alleging operational problems on the Elsdon Line, including excessive train idling, false gate activations, and blocked crossings. The Board ordered CSXT to provide monthly reports for one year on a number of key factors, including false gate activations, location/duration/cause for all blocked crossings, and the status of operating protocols with other carriers that impact the Elsdon Line.

The monthly reporting was extended for six months in a decision served on July 27, 2017, in which the Board noted that CSXT had made some operational improvements but that it remained concerned about fluidity problems on the Line. The Board extended reporting for an additional six months on December 14, 2017, explaining that the monthly reports submitted since July 2017 have not alleviated the Board's concerns. In particular, the monthly reports over the second half of 2017 showed an upward trend in the incidents of blocked crossings in excess of 10 minutes and the total number of minutes crossings were blocked in such incidents. The Board stated that it was troubled that the progress that was shown in July 2017 had subsequently deteriorated. Accordingly, the Board ordered CSXT to continue reporting for an additional six months, though modified the reporting requirement to include information regarding train lengths on the Line, as train length could bear directly on the number and duration of crossing blockages.

¹ The digest constitutes no part of the decision of the Board but has been prepared for the convenience of the reader. It may not be cited to or relied upon as precedent. See Policy Statement on Plain Language Digests in Decisions, EP 696 (STB served Sept. 2, 2010).

The six-month reporting period that was ordered in December 2017 has now expired. The reports submitted during that reporting period indicate that CSXT has made improvements to reduce the number of false activations on the Line.² However, with respect to blocked crossings, CSXT's recent monthly reports demonstrate that issues remain regarding the number and duration of blocked crossings. As shown in the table below, while blockages have decreased from their peak late last year, they remain above the levels when reporting began in July 2016.³

Blocked Crossings on the Eldson Line (Entire Line)

	July 2016	Dec. 2017	June 2018
Monthly Count of Blocked Crossings Greater Than 10 Minutes	169	955	632
Total Duration of Blocked Crossings (by Minutes) on Monthly Basis	3,820	18,853	12,887

It is apparent that CSXT must focus its efforts to markedly improve operations on the Eldson Line. Accordingly, the Board requests that CSXT establish and provide to the Board a plan detailing additional actions that CSXT will take to improve fluidity of operations and reduce the number and duration of blocked crossings on the Line. Please also indicate the operational changes and/or investments that CSXT is taking or intends to take to reduce the duration and frequency of blocked crossings, as well when these actions will be completed. Based on the responses provided by CSXT, the Board will consider whether additional action is required.

It is ordered:

1. CSXT is directed to file its response as discussed above by August 16, 2018.
2. This decision is effective on its service date.

By the Board, Board Members Begeman and Miller.

² The number of false activations for March to June of 2018 has averaged 13.75, compared to a high of 35 in January 2018 and 25 in July 2016, the first month of reporting.

³ The data indicates that increases in blockages and duration have occurred on both the southern segment (Western Avenue through Wentworth Avenue) and the northern segment of the Line (Broadway Street through 55th Street).