

December 11, 2016

Dear Mr Blodgett,

We are sending you a plea to do everything in your power to block the Great Lakes Basin Railroad project. (FD 35952).

I initially heard about the Great Lakes Basin Railroad reroute through Winnebago County in October 2016, the day of the public forum in Rockton, IL. We are shocked that a private company is planning to build a toll railroad bisecting our county and may obtain our land through imminent domain. We honestly thought it was too ridiculous of a notion to be a reality. Our county would be cut in half, the rail line cutting us off from virtually everywhere we go and everything we do. The proposed rail line, once up and running estimated up to 110 trains per day (approximately every 15 minutes) at a speed up to 70 miles per hour.

I have a 23 mile (45 minute) commute to Rockford for work. If this private railroad goes through, it will close the road I drive to and from work every day, and would require me to backtrack west to Boswell Road to find an east/west thoroughfare. I estimate my commute time to increase to 1-1.5 hours each way to and from work. In addition, the remaining open roads will be more congested, slowing traffic more than before. EVERYTHING WE DO requires travel eastward; work, grocery shopping, restaurants, schools and visiting friends and family. Our Emergency Medical services, school bus service all comes from the east. Our school district would also be cut in half by the rail line. Disruptions in travel time is one more burden WE would have to bear. The excessive travel time needed for Emergency personnel traveling to assist us in a life threatening event would limit a positive medical outcome for any of us to the west of the rail line. ALL OF NORTHWEST WINNEBAGO COUNTY WILL BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THIS RAIL LINE.

From an environmental standpoint, we have the delicate Nygren wetlands and the Sugar River nearby. We are surrounded by wildlife whose safety would be threatened by trains cutting through their territory. Acres of important farmland would be appropriated. We fear the pollution and ground water contamination caused by train travel near these areas would be detrimental and in the event of a derailment or spill- catastrophic!!

My husband and I live in rural Winnebago County. In 2015 Winnebago County property taxes ranked 25th highest out of the 3,143 counties in the United States. Our schools are very good. We do not have city water or sewer. Our fire department is made up of volunteers. We pay for our garbage pickup. We CHOOSE to live here because we LIKE the peace and quiet; it is one of the few benefits we have. We are not looking for noise or air pollution, increased commute time or threats to personal safety presented by graded rail crossings. The proximity of this proposed railroad would only further decrease our withering home and property values.

Tolls charged to rail companies to use this rail line will only be passed on to consumers; AGAIN- no benefit to the public.

According to GOTO 2040 study published by Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning in 2010, percentage of freight movement is as follows:

67% truck, 30% rail, 3% other (water and air freight).

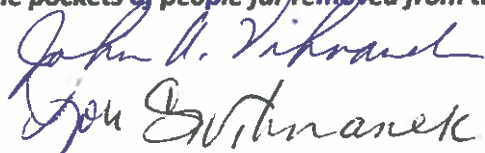
The study also reports "*Many heavy freight rail lines have fallen into disuse or are currently underutilized.*" It suggests this is due to insufficient funding. A study conducted by U of I Champaign in 2012 lists the number one cause of train derailments is broken rails or welds. Why would any entity build a new rail route if there is insufficient funding to maintain existing rail lines?

Better alternatives:

- *Improve and maintain current and under-utilized rail routes* - will not require more land acquisition. Norfolk Southern Railway and Union Pacific Railway have already stated they would not use the GLBR. Norfolk Southern and the Canadian National Railway Company have *their own* bypasses around Chicago suggesting the GLBR is unnecessary.
- *Increase use of Panama Canal to reroute goods to opposite coasts.* On June 26, 2016, Panama completed the widening of the Panama Canal to accommodate the new container ships. The efficiency of shipping by water is 50 to 1 vs shipping by rail. Again, this suggests that a new rail line really is not necessary.
- *Improve and expand highways for more efficient truck freight transportation.* (67% freight transport is via trucking, which supports the argument for improved trucking routes.) GOTO2040 acknowledges that truck routes need to be updated and improved for better efficiency. Statistics also show improved safety in truck freight transport; freight truck crashes decreased 11% from 2006 to 2008. Even in the event of a truck crash, the environmental impact is not as devastating as a train derailment.

In summary, we see no evidence of any local benefit to be realized by the GLB railroad. We hear about economic benefits and jobs, but no one has actually outlined what those benefits might be. Goods transported by rail would not stop here; it is by definition a 'through route'. Thousands of acres of productive farmland (roughly 24 acres per mile of train track) would be taken. If the railroad is built it will be of significant detriment to our way of life and especially to all of us living near or west of the proposed route. The impact of a derailment and subsequent spill of hazardous material in our area would take years and many taxpayer dollars to recover and rebuild. This isn't about NIMBY or BANANA. There are better alternatives. ***Any economic gain to be realized from this private railroad project would only line the pockets of people far removed from the citizens residing here.***

Sincerely,



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References:

GOTO2040; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; 2010

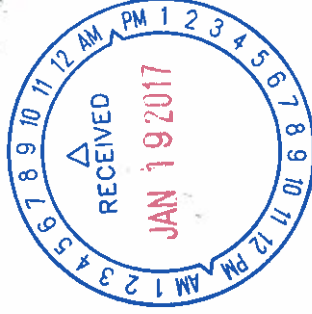
Analysis of Causes of Major Train Derailment and Their Effect on Accident Rates; Xiang Lui, Rapik Saat, and Christopher P.L. Barkan; U of I Champaign; 2012

Quantitative Analysis of Factors Affecting Accident Probability and Severity; R.T Anderson; U of I Champaign; 2005

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Surface Transportation Board
Docket # FD 35952
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