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09 February 2008

To: The Surface Transportation Board
Congresswoman Melissa Bean
Congressman Mark Kirk
Village President John Tolomei

Subject: Comments – Proposed Sale of Elgin Joliet & Eastern Railway to
Canadian National Railway

Dear Madams and Sirs:

As a resident of the Wicklow Village Town Homes, located less than 400 yards from the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern (EJ&E) railroad, and one who drives almost daily across one or more of the EJ&E grade crossings in and near Lake Zurich, I am very concerned about the potential impact of the proposed acquisition of the EJ&E by the Canadian National Railway (CN).

Rail transportation is vitally important to the economy of the United States because it is a very economical means of moving bulk materials and products long distances. Therefore, although I am concerned I am not opposed, in principle, to the acquisition.

The problem of moving freight through large population centers, such as the metropolitan Chicago area are real and should be of concern to all. The acquisition of the EJ&E by CN would permit CN freight to realize improved routing of a significant amount of freight – but the societal impact must be satisfactorily addressed before the instant acquisition is approved.

The principle concerns I have are: 1) interruption of the flow of motor vehicles, including public safety vehicles (fire, police, and ambulances); 2) increased risk of collision with motor vehicles at grade crossings; 3) noise, both along the track and near grade crossings; and, 4) maintenance and security of the rail right-of-way.

The first two concerns would readily be addressed if the CN were required, as a condition of approval, to construct – at CN expense – rail over/underpasses at the extant grade crossings. Such separation of rail and motor vehicle traffic would also eliminate the whistle noises required at grade crossings.

The rail noises (wheels, couplings, and engine) cannot be eliminated by its propagation can be mitigated by suitably dense plantings at the sides of and within the railroad right-of-way.

Safety of my neighbors can be assured by maintenance and security of the right-of-way.

At the present time the road bed and rails are open and, although such behavior is illegal, many of our village youth make use of the right-of-way as a very short cut home from the schools that are adjacent to the right-of-way. Selection and density of plantings (see the paragraph immediately above) could discourage such use and/or disguise suitable fencing to reduce intrusion.

Finally, the CN has experienced a number of derailments (mostly in Canada) since 2004, indicative of poor maintenance of track, rolling stock, and/or crew training. It is my opinion that we need some evidence and assurance that CN has taken all reasonable steps to minimize the risk of derailment and the attendant hazards presented, both as a physical result of derailment and the potential of hazardous cargo spillage.

Respectfully yours,

W. E. Medcalf, Jr.

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Surface Transportation Board
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