

Kathryn Rudy
13484 Capron Rd
Capron, IL 61012

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Dear Surface Transportation Board,

We are writing to urge a thorough environmental, economic and social review of the Great Lakes Basin railway. As the proposed railway project threatens our local transportation, land use, air quality, safety, aquifers, property values, recreation and aesthetics in a permanent fashion, we wish to be assured that this project is in the best possible location and truly for the public good. Infrastructure of this scope and impact should be placed where it has the greatest long-term potential for public good and public development; and it shouldn't be placed at all if for short-term economic benefits and private profit. Let this be a guiding principle.

Land Use:

As farmers, we place great value in our water and soil; value that lasts for generations and transcends short-term economic transactions. Poorly placed railways accelerate the loss of farmland and soil and water resources as they promote industrial growth on agricultural land. The best possible social utility may not be met by destroying prime farmland, specifically zoned and protected for agriculture.

The loss of natural and native habitats is also of great concern. Railways further fragment habitats and ecosystems, making it harder for native ecosystems to grow and thrive. The proposed route travels right through one of our county's conservation areas; and is placed near quite a few others! At a time when we are working to mitigate the loss of and rebuild our biological, soil and water ecosystem services, including the restoration of native pollinator habitat, we don't need another railway cutting through our forests, waterways, prairies and fields. We urge great trepidation when building new train tracks that will permanently alter our native communities. If railway tracks must be built, let's avoid areas that most promote healthy water and soil systems and provide important native habitats. In addition, please make the path as narrow as possible. A 200 ft. wide path of destruction seems unnecessarily wide. In terms of wetland mitigation, habitat destruction in our area should be mitigated in our area; directly benefiting our local ecosystems.

My family is also transitioning some land to organically certified agriculture. This is an expensive and highly regulated endeavor. Are the railways sprayed for continued weed abatement to prevent the spread of weed seeds throughout the area? Who will be responsible for making sure overspray doesn't occur in neighboring fields, or compensating local farmers if overspray should damage crops or threaten organic certification?

Water Resources:

Our family drinks water stored directly below our home and yard, in a shallow aquifer; very common in this area. It's not hard to imagine train accidents and spills that could contaminate these wells and vulnerable groundwater recharge locations. Will policies be in place to protect aquifers and hold the railway accountable should contamination occur?

Local Transportation/Safety:

Without a doubt, trains traveling through the area will cause delays in traffic and an increased risk and incidence of traffic accidents. At-grade crossings on roads such as North Boone School Rd., Rt. 173 and others specifically affect routes frequented by our school-aged children. Please work with local school districts to minimize such crossings and local government bodies to determine the best routes to minimize traffic delays.

Environmental Justice:

Farm families have worked hard to develop this land for agriculture and preserve it for our families. It's where we live and work, raising our children and our crops. It is a grave undertaking indeed, to forcibly part this land from families and place it in the hands of those who know nothing of our community, and care little for our way of life; those who plan to forever alter it, without any significant plans to benefit our community. At best, we are talking about land in our community benefiting only those outside our community.

We also can't ignore that the transportation of oil and other fossil fuels is likely a driving force behind this development project. Is this truly a project for broad social good given what we know about fossil fuel's environmental and social impacts?

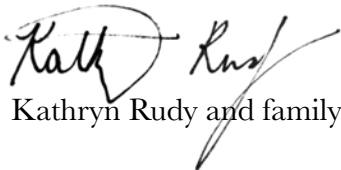
Noise/Recreation/Aesthetics:

Our farm is about a mile from the current proposed route, with fairly flat farm ground in between. We will be able to see and hear the trains as they travel through our neighborhood. We do not expect this to improve the view or the ambiance on our farm, and we hope to live here for generations to come. We are concerned about the noise, air and aesthetic impacts in this agricultural area. If this train project is indeed deemed good and necessary, we hope it will be re-routed in an area already impacted by automobile and train traffic so as to minimize this intrusion - perhaps alongside current highways and through industrialized areas.

Last, but not least, our family and many others use our local creeks and waterways for recreation (specifically the Piscasaw Creek and the Geryune Creek); including canoeing, creek walking, fishing, wildlife observation and appreciation, and more. The aesthetics of such activities will be greatly impacted by train tracks and travel. Practically speaking, as the tracks travel over the waterways, will the clearance be high enough over Piscasaw Creek to ensure continued navigability and enjoyment of these areas? Will soil movement be carefully planned and executed so as to avoid negatively impacting these recreational uses?

Is it difficult to imagine how this train could positively impact Boone County with its current route, and it most-certainly will cause harm. Please do us the honor of considering these concerns as you discuss the viability and route options of this high-impact project.

Most Sincerely,



Kathryn Rudy and family