



December 19, 2016

Ms. Victoria Rutson
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Mr. Kenneth Blodgett
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Dear Ms. Rutson and Mr. Blodgett:

As a duly elected representative in southern Wisconsin, I write to express my opposition to the Great Lakes Basin Rail Line (GLBRL) and to request more information about both the rail line and the Surface Transportation Board's (STB) plan moving forward. I ask you to consider my position on behalf of my constituents in your review of this proposal and to respond to my questions as soon as possible.

I strongly oppose the GLBRL both as a concept as well as the particular route proposed through western Rock County. Any advantages and economic development brought by the GLBRL will not be realized by the people living and working along the route or by the general public.

This rail line will not provide new transportation options to people living nearby. I have seen no indications that the rail line will provide more efficient ways to get local or regional goods to market. I have seen no evidence that once completed, the rail line will increase the living standards of nearby residents. Therefore, the only benefits seem to accrue to a single corporation, Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. (GLBT), and its executives and shareholders. Meanwhile, all of the costs will be borne by those residents, including my constituents, who live and work along the proposed route.

I ask that the STB reject the plan entirely and choose a "no build" option. I also request that STB makes this decision as quickly as possible so the residents of southern Wisconsin can get on with their lives.

Additional Public Comment Needed

A previous route for the Wisconsin portion of the GLBRL was proposed to be a few miles east of the Village of Clinton. On September 20, 2016, GLBT proposed a new route, traveling north along the west side of the City of Beloit, then heading east between Beloit and Janesville. This new route is almost 15 miles west from the original proposed line.

As you may remember, on September 29, 2016, State Senator Janis Ringhand and I submitted a letter to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) requesting that additional public comment periods be opened. We also requested that you hold at least one additional public informational meeting, in or near Beloit. Because of the substantial change to the Wisconsin portion of the GLBRL, the residents of the Town of Beloit and nearby areas deserve a chance to be heard.

45TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

To date, no public hearings have occurred, and no additional public comment period has been opened. I again request that additional public hearings be held, that public comment be taken, and that you provide the public with more information on the proposal's future.

Previous conversations indicated that a new public comment period on the Scope of Study would likely take place sometime in the spring of 2017. I am concerned that the recent suspension of environmental review for the project could delay this timeline and thus my constituents' chance to be heard and to be informed. I would like an update on the expected timeline for the next public comment period to be opened, and I request that a public informational meeting be held in or near Beloit during the first quarter of 2017.

Request for Information

Recent news reports have indicated that the STB has granted a request from GLBT for the Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) to suspend its environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). On behalf of my constituents, I would like to know the reason for this suspension and delay.

Your letter to GLBT dated December 13, 2016¹, offers little to no explanation of why you are allowing GLBT to extend this already lengthy process and potentially do serious harm to my constituents and other residents of southern Wisconsin. In fact, you specifically note in that letter that "stopping and starting the NEPA review process often adds time and expense to the process and increases the burden on all stakeholders." Why is STB allowing a single company to increase the burden on everyone?

Second, I would like to know how long this delay will be. Your letter indicates that an update from GLBT should be provided by February 28, 2017. Does this mean that environmental review will begin again on that date? Or does this mean only an update is required, and the delay could stretch indefinitely?

As you noted, any delay in this project has a significant impact on those who live along the proposed route. Even the prospect of a rail line has severe negative effects on the lives of Wisconsin residents. Both residents and businesses in this area are having to put their lives on hold while waiting to see what the OEA will do.

Public Opposition

Over the course of many months, it has become very apparent that the residents of my district, as well as neighboring districts, adamantly oppose the GLBRL. My office has received many calls, letters, emails, and personal visits from constituents who are directly affected.

When it became clear the STB would not hold additional public meetings in 2016, State Sen. Ringhand and I held our own listening session on Nov. 30, 2016. Over 300 concerned residents attended, and not a single person registered or spoke in favor of the rail line. To the contrary, we had 25 people speak out against the rail line in a matter of 90 minutes. Overall, the people who attended were extremely nervous and worried about the line. They relayed frustrations with the process, with the perceived one sided benefit, and their sincere worries for their futures.

We heard stirring testimony about the effects the rail line would have on property values, farm land, economic development, and public safety. I have highlighted some of those concerns below.

Public Safety

¹ Letter from Victoria Rutson, Dir., Surface Transportation Board, to Frank Patton, Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. (December 13, 2016)
(http://www.greatlakesbasinraileis.com/documents/GLBT_Response_Patton_121316.pdf)

At our Nov. 30 listening session, I heard over and over again from area residents concerned with safety should this rail line be built. According to GLBT's letter dated Nov. 10, 2016, the company expects 5-10 trains a day going through the Beloit area, travelling at average speeds between 51-55 MPH.² This type of rail traffic could pose serious safety risks to slow-moving farm implements, delays to safety vehicles, and overall impediment to the well-being of area residents.

Economic development and property values

As I am sure you are aware, most Americans' single largest source of individual wealth is their home. Families spend years saving for, paying off mortgages, and maintaining their piece of the American Dream. For residents of southern Wisconsin, the value of their property is heavily tied to their financial security. I heard from numerous people that their retirement plan relied heavily on the property value of their homes and land.

The construction of this rail line, as well as any delay of a final decision, seriously impacts property values to the detriment of many residents. Market values of property will plummet if potential buyers know part of the parcel will soon be condemned for a rail line. Additionally, property values will decrease with even the potential a property will be condemned. This is exactly what has occurred, and will continue to occur, with the specter of this rail line looming over Rock County.

Who would buy a home in the area of this line if they knew they may be forced out in a year or two? An unpredictable future for any piece of property causes negative economic impacts, which translate to pain and insecurity for the people involved. The people who live or own property near this proposed route deserve to know the future of their economic security.

People who were planning to sell or have a need to sell their property in the next few years will take losses on these sales whether or not a rail line is ever built. The sooner this project is rejected, the fewer of these losses will occur. If the rail line is built, GLBT will be required to compensate property owners for the strip of land actually acquired, but not for the lost value of the remaining property. Many property owners will lose value that will never be compensated.

Furthermore, the soil of southern Wisconsin is some of the finest in the world. Agriculture is a major economic engine in Wisconsin and many residents in this area count on farming to survive. The construction of a rail line directly through this land, and the subsequent loss of such rich and productive farmland would be a death blow to farmers. The rail line would also divide fields and make farming the land that remains more difficult and costly.

Moreover, ripping up land to build this rail line will have auxiliary effects on the local economy. One woman testified that she owns a local restaurant attached to her farm. The restaurant depends on people who want to know where their food comes from driving out to a quiet spot in the country and seeing animals in the neighboring field as they gather to eat with friends or family. The proposed rail line would separate this restaurant from the fields that provide food for it, and disturb the peace and quiet that attracts people to the site in the first place.

Alliant Energy's Riverside Energy Center

As it currently is proposed, the GLBRL would cut directly through property owned and currently being developed by Alliant Energy. This 90-acre site will house the Riverside Energy Center, a natural gas and

² Appx. 1-3, Letter from James T. Wilson, Pres. & CEO, Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc., to Victoria Rutson, Director, Surface Transportation Board Office of Environmental Analysis (Nov. 10, 2016) (http://www.greatlakesbasinraileis.com/links_docs.html)

solar generating station. Construction has already begun, and is expected to extend into 2020. In fact, a groundbreaking ceremony in the Town of Beloit occurred on September 22, 2016, right around the time GLBT changed their preferred route.

The Riverside Energy Center will be capable of providing 700 megawatts of total generation, which is enough to power 535,000 homes. The project will also include a 2-megawatt solar facility. Alliant estimates the Riverside Energy Center's capital investment at \$700 million, making it one of the state's largest economic development projects.

The building process, slated to last from 2016 to 2020, will create local employment opportunities, estimated at 1,000 total construction jobs per year between 2017 and 2020. Alliant estimates this could provide up to \$250 million in total economic benefit.³

How will GLBT and STB-OEA account for this enormous oversight? Does GLBT believe they will be able to purchase this land? How will OEA's environmental or feasibility studies take this into account? If it is not possible to cross the Rock River in this location, where does GLBT propose to cross, and what negative economic impacts would an alternative crossing have? At the very least, GLBT appears to not have done their due diligence in researching the feasibility of their route. I again encourage you to choose a no-build option.

Conclusion

Surely you now understand the major and detrimental impacts this rail line will have on my constituents and the residents of southern Wisconsin. I strongly believe this rail line goes against the best interests of my district, and that affected members of the public should be offered a chance to make their voices heard on the potential impacts of GLBRL.

To summarize, I would request that the Surface Transportation Board:

- Expand opportunities for public input and comment
- Reject the plan and choose a no build option
- Move forward as fast as possible so people can move on and limit property value losses

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and I look forward to working with you to ensure the preservation of the best interests of the residents of Southern Wisconsin.

Sincerely,



State Rep. Mark Spreitzer
45th Assembly District

cc: Mike Blaszek, Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc
Congressman Mark Pocan
U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senator Ron Johnson
Governor Scott Walker
Kristen Gilkes, Alliant Energy

³ See *Riverside Energy Center Expansion*,
<http://www.alliantenergy.com/AboutAlliantEnergy/CompanyInformation/Riverside>, (Last visited Dec. 16, 2016)