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Surface Transportation Board
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FD 35087



I have sent two different letters to several local newspapers, including the Chicago Tribune and the Daily Herald, plus a couple smaller other ones asking that they include the following thoughts for everyone's consideration. The Daily Herald advised they would print, but I have not heard from the others. So many articles and editorials in the local newspapers are so full of folks who just have no understanding of transportation logistics, let alone the uniqueness of rail transportation. All many of them know of is commuter service and are completely lost in freight issues, but speak up at all the regional meetings regardless of not possessing any real information, only registering complaints at what they perceive to be a disruption in their lives. Thus, I felt compelled to write the following. The second was letter was in response to a specific article appearing in the Chicago Tribune and was sent to the column writer as well at the editor. I would like to submit both letters as part of the STB consideration in the CN - EJ&E acquisition. I have never quite been able to completely understand why the folks opposed to a merger that will enhance the efficient movement of freight about our country believe they are entitled to compensation or operating conditions, when they have really not been disenfranchised to begin with, but the suburbs are full of demands for CN to fix problems that these same communities have been unwilling to address for many years.

Letter I

U.S. Railroads were the catalyst of growth and development in the 1800's and yet with the advent of the Interstate highways in the 40's/50's had to begin to virtually fight for their very existence. The fuel tax impact on our highway system actually subsidizes to an extent, the trucking companies, who flourished for so many years, until the recent past when high fuel prices began to tip the scale towards the much more fuel-efficient railroads. For many years the trucking industry carried the more profitable commodities while railroads only advantage was to carry the large, bulk products like coal, grain, fertilizers, etc. As cost, particularly for fuel increased and the capacity of the highway system began to create significant congestion, the railroads finally have once again began to be a much more valued commodity. With the Department of Transportation estimates of required future freight capacity of as much as 80% growth over the next 20 years, railroads will have to do much of the heavy lifting to keep from mass congestion on our nations highways. Population growth and imported products will continue at an increasing rate and it will be impossible to build a sufficient amount of highway capacity to handle this. The infrastructure for railroads is also virtually limited to what we have today. When railroads were built, virtually every railroad ran through Chicago, which is true to a large degree today. Realizing the elongated amount of time it takes to move freight "through" Chicago today, the entire Create Project was born with a billion dollar plus, price tag and no funding to be found. The CN has

chosen to take matters into their own hands to help solve much of this problem, which is to purchase the EJ&E, a vastly under-utilized shortline rail system that would solve many of the problems. Alas, we have the problems we are facing today in the suburban communities of wanting to keep our peaceful ways as is.

However, it might do some good to examine why we have this issue in the first place.

I think people forget the history of the railroads and the suburbs and who created the congestion and limited crossings, etc. The railroads were here first. Folks not wanting to live in the City, but yet work there moved to the various suburbs, slowly moving further and further from the city as each became more populated. The railroads provided commuter service to these suburbs for many years until the costs became too much to support with rider fares, then the Metra system was born and the local tax payers now pay for almost 50% of the cost of rider ship across the region. All in the name of "traffic congestion" relief. As people crowded the tracks and filled the crossings, they didn't seem to be bright enough to "not" cross the tracks while a train was coming, causing an undue number of accidents. Suburbs, not wanting to spend the money to signal all these crossings decided to shut many of them down and funnel the local citizens into a limited number of protected crossings. Despite wanting more trains to carry more residents, requiring more tax dollars, these same local communities that closed crossings creating fewer places to cross and who also "did not" have the vision or were "not willing" to pay the cost to expand their own roadway system began to/and continue to experience severe congestion. They now seem to be expecting railroads to pay for their lack of planning and foresight. Build under/over passes, they say. This will not fix the core problem as most of the congestion I encounter when transversing the suburbs is not at the rail crossings, but at places like, downtown Barrington which has little to do with the railroad, but the configuration of the highway crossings. Besides the problem with the trains there, is about rush hour trains and people riding them, they don't even run freight at rush hour. Other problem spots: Route 59? No trains. Ditto for Route 34 and 59 and Randall Road. No trains, just people and lack of alternate routes and poor planning. The issue at railroad tracks is only the occasional train that an automobile, for perhaps 3-5 minutes has to wait for the train to cross. A potential does exist for a train to have a malfunction which takes some time to handle, but I encounter this frequently on our interstates, and the traffic control folks seem very willing to just shut down the highway and wait for things to get sorted out and that seems to be acceptable.

The issue over the EJ&E is no different than the completion of I-355, the proposed widening of highway 47 and so many other projects that are really good for our transportation network, but were or are being held up by a bunch of people who want to keep our communities like it was when they moved out here. This can never be. Population growth is here to stay. Commerce to feed, cloth and house these people is coming and if we don't make the decision to "assist" this process instead of blocking them we will be constipated when it comes to moving throughout our communities forever. There are real costs to this nation to look to the future on transportation, both for the commercial movement of freight and for people as well. The small amount of added congestion

to be brought by CN to the EJ&E is minor compared to the congestion issues that each suburb faces in other areas today. We should let the CN move forward with a plan they are willing to fund that mitigates much of the congestion issues and all the energy being expended to fight this be focused on our other problem areas.

I say this with all due respect to all those folks that are working to provide solutions, but the problem is getting worse each day, not better and becoming more antagonistic as it goes on. There are things the CN should be required to do, but rebuilding communities to solve problems they had nothing to do with causing is not among them.

Letter II

An interesting article in the Trib today. As a retired railroader (Sales & Marketing) I would like to add my two cents worth if you are running a follow-up article.

Metra seems to think the CN would offer difficulties in their operation of the STAR line by running 25-30 trains per day on a line that would like to support likely only several commuter trains per day. The rest of the commuter lines in Chicago area already operate very well on lines that run far more trains than this. The secret is that the rush hour trains have freight train moratoriums during these critical rush hours.

I would see this as no different. If the issue here is to try to continue to create alternatives to highway traffic congestion, why is it important to inhibit CN from an acquisition that will work to this same goal. Restricting the railroad from improving freight service through Chicago will only grow truck traffic in the Metro Chicago area, making for more congested interstates and toll ways. This would be a pretty poor trade off, putting commuters on rail at a high taxpayer subsidy so trucks can run better on the toll way. One train running over the EJ&E will take 400 trucks out of the Chicago area highways. Remember these trains are only running through Chicago, not stopping to switch cars on the way.

The cities protesting seem very willing to put up new stoplights at every intersection. These lights are a minute or so long. A train running at 40 mph will clear a crossing in less than 5 minutes. I would argue the traffic congestion in the suburbs today is far longer because of the traffic light situation than the train traffic. Barrington, train or no train is a mess. Highway 59 north and south through the suburb, is a nightmare and removing the train would do little to change that. Besides, if the train were not in Barrington, there would be no reason for the suburb to exist. It was established as a community because of the train and the ability to get to downtown Chicago. What numbers of freight trains actually run through there each day, 5 or 6 Total?? The commuter trains cause the problem in Barrington, not the freights that run during midday or at night. Only the commuters run at the high rush hour points. So the same would be true of the CN on the EJ&E line if they were restricted on running during rush hour.

The second issue is one of cost. Big issues have been made of the cost of senior citizen's free rides on Metra. What is missed is that perhaps 50% of Metra cost is already subsidized by the taxpayer already. So few seniors ride free. The taxpayer is already paying for half of the rest of all the commuters in Chicago area to ride the train each day. Think of the cost to the taxpayer if the EJ&E line were to run only the two EJ&E trains and a handful of commuter trains. What would the taxpayer portion of that ride be, 75-85%. Who will pay the cost of constructing stations and then the support of the everyday maintenance and upkeep with this low volume? With the CN moving a few trains, mind you 25-30 trains in a day is light traffic for a major railroad line, they will perform maintenance and improvements to a line that is already in decent shape, but with added sidings, etc. will create more capacity to run trains of all kinds and to keep any congestion at a minimum.

These infrastructure improvements will both benefit the commuter line and limit the traffic issues to each and every local community. I attended several of the local meetings on the CN/EJ&E acquisition. The major issues were that everyone would be sitting in lines all day waiting for the trains to pass. That every ambulance had a critical patient inside at every train crossing and would die in the 5 minutes they sat for the train to cross and that the other side of every town was on fire and the fire house was located on the other side of the tracks. Will some of this take place? I'm sure it will. However, can we not get past the idea that as critical as the CREATE project is to Chicago and freight commerce across the entire US, this acquisition will have a great and immediate, impact on this commercial situation.

Like it or not, there will be many more people in the US and in the Chicago area in the coming years. To support this there will have to be great commercial transportation improvements for both commuter and freight systems. Rail lines have returned to a very prominent role in filling both of these functions. There is not enough land or money to build all the new highways needed to manage this increasing demand and what rail line right-of-ways that exist must be maintained and developed. The CN is looking at an option that should have been done many years ago. I believe it is critical to the Chicago area and the future in transportation that this project is completed and

Thank you,

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I have lived and traveled in these same Fox Valley communities for 40 years while managing business units for the railroads, mainly C&NW, so I know the area very well. The worst travel areas are not the rail crossings, but the poor planning by our suburban officials in handling congestion issues. Building over/under passes to alleviate crossing congestion will do nothing to improve traffic flow until they fix the really bad congestion issues at the other locations.