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ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ELGIE R. SIMS, JR.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, 34th DISTRICT

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July 1, 2016

Dave Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
Docket No. FD 35952
395 E. Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-001

Dear Mr. Navecky,

As promised, this letter is a follow up to my letter of June 23, 2016, regarding the Great Lake Basin project (the “Project”) and the Town Hall meeting I hosted in conjunction with U.S. Representative Robin Kelly and elected officials of the Village of Grant Park and Kankakee County. The purpose of the meeting was to gain a better understanding of the concerns raised by many of my constituents and the reasons behind their opposition to the Project. Nearly 100 residents joined in this discussion to voice their opposition to a project, they believe will lead to the destruction of Grant Park and surrounding communities. The following is a synopsis of the concerns raised during the meeting:

The environmental concerns focused mainly on what many residents considered to be the irreversible and ruinous impact the Project will have on local communities. Several participants indicated that altering the land would disrupt the natural flow of surface water potentially creating artificial ponds and wetlands. Others pointed to the negative impact the Project would have on destroying land needed to produce food used to feed American families. Concerns were raised regarding the unimaginable damage the Project will cause to the meticulous field tiles, drainage systems connecting several farms, leading to the flooding of fields, furthering exacerbating the disruption of remaining farmland. There were also concerns that the construction of rails will lead to the separation of some farmland, decreasing accessibility and causing over compaction of existing soil.

Furthermore, concerns were raised regarding the potential impact on pollution in the Kankakee River, the source of drinking water for 80,000 people. Residents also addressed the resulting noise pollution caused by the construction of the Project and the flow of trains following construction. Also, because the rail yard will be built near the school, the noise pollution will disrupt the educational experience of students, which many estimated would cause parents to take their children out of local schools, effectively destroying the local school district. However, for those students who remain, school buses will have to be rerouted and oftentimes blocked because of the rail traffic, increasing travel times for students living far away from the school, furthering negatively impacting students.

Moreover, concerns were raised over the displacement of families, institutions and wildlife as a result of the Project. Currently, 18 of the 20 sections making up Sumner Township in Grant Park are in the proposed path of the Project, this would effectively eliminate the Grant Park community. The Zion Lutheran Church, established in 1872, has a five-acre property, which includes its sanctuary, fellowship hall, parsonage and cemetery in the current path of the route proposed for the Project. The proposed route will force the church, its cemetery, with 600 plots and room to service 300 additional lots, as well as another cemetery nearby to relocate. Residents also raised the potential endangerment to wild life the

Project presents. The current proposed path of the Project goes through Kankakee River State Park, residents contend this Project will effectively destroy the natural habitats of native species such as deer, bald eagles, and other forms of wildlife. In addition, the Project would displace the existing 4-H campgrounds where a number of community events are held.

Similarly, residents addressed the negative impact the Project would have on the ability of first-responders to respond to emergency conditions. Residents contend the time it will take for first responders to react to a call will increase dramatically because of the increased rail traffic. Also, several residents raised the fiscal burden on the Village having to provide training for first-responders in the case of a derailment, wreck or hazardous spill as an important factor in their opposition to the project.

There were several concerns raised by residents that must be addressed and clarified prior to the process regarding the Project moving forward. First, there were concerns that residents did not feel there was a consistent explanation of the eminent domain process coming from the Surface Transportation Board (the "Board") and as a result are seeking clarification regarding when it can and how it will be used. Second, many residents expressed frustration that they believe the Project was initiated without following proper protocols. Finally, several residents expressed concern that there was a lack of communication coming from the Board properly informing them of the Project and the steps necessary for its approval.

In conclusion, many residents who participated in the meeting and those who have communicated with me following it are concerned the Project will irreparably change the quality of their community by destroying the value of their property, irreversibly changing the use of the land and displacing people and institutions that have called this community home for generations. It is imperative that the concerns of my constituents are taken into consideration and addressed accordingly prior to the process moving to the next step. Should you have any questions or need additional clarifications, I may be reached by phone at (773) 783-8800 or via email at RepSims34@gmail.com.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elgie R. Sims, Jr." in a cursive script.

Elgie R. Sims, Jr.
State Representative, 34th District

CC: The Honorable Richard J. Durbin, United States Senator, Illinois
The Honorable Mark S. Kirk, United States Senator, Illinois
The Honorable Robin Kelly, Member of Congress
The Honorable Adam Kinzinger, Member of Congress
The Honorable Bruce Rauner, Governor, Illinois
The Honorable Scott Walker, Governor, Wisconsin
The Honorable Mike Pence, Governor, Indiana