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PLAINFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT



September 8, 2008

Ms. Phillis Johnson-Ball
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

Re: STB Finance Docket #35087

Dear Ms. Johnson-Ball:

The purpose of this letter is to express my concern over the proposed purchase of the EJ&E Railway by the Canadian National Railway. This takeover by the Canadian National Railway (CN) will increase rail traffic on the current EJ&E tracks by 300%, and that type of increase will have a crippling affect on the Village of Plainfield and the motoring public that will need to cross those tracks on a daily basis.

As Chief of Police for the last 23 years for the Village of Plainfield, I have seen first-hand the real impact that local and regional growth has had on our community. Just a short 15 years ago, Plainfield was a mere 5,000 resident population, while today we are close to 40,000 people plus another 60,000 in the surrounding subdivisions. This population explosion has had its impact on the regional transportation system, especially as it relates to state-controlled highways within the Village, as current vehicular traffic volumes far exceed their initial design capacity. Local commuters seeking access to the interstate system and beyond have strangled both major highways through Plainfield causing total gridlock at certain times of the day.

The CN Business Plan indicates they will increase rail traffic from 18 trains a day on the mainline to 42 per day. This, combined with the longer trains being proposed, will have a substantial impact on the quality of life in Plainfield, especially during peak traffic periods as we see freight trains coming through at 30-34 minute intervals. Considering the proposed train movement by CN, Plainfield vehicular traffic will not have the ability to rebound prior to the next train stopping traffic again at each grade crossing. Here in Plainfield, all major roads except Route 59 cross the EJ&E tracks at some point within the Village limits. The lone roadway, Rt. 59 with its train overpass, is still being impacted due to its close proximity with the EJ&E tracks on IL 126. The smaller and less frequent EJ&E trains already delay traffic enough to where vehicular/truck traffic backs up onto IL Rt. 59 blocking or hampering north & south traffic movement. These traffic tie-ups will be much more severe by the longer and more frequent train movement being proposed by CN.



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Donald E. Bennett, Chief of Police



A single (CN) train coming thru Plainfield will block all five (5) downtown crossings at once, trapping emergency vehicles to one side of town. This situation is compounded by natural geographic restrictions, which will cause delayed emergency responses. If track blockage occurs, emergency units must travel 4 to 5 miles out of the way to be able to get around to the other side of the tracks. In addition, the everyday motorist will see increased delays, added hazards to go to the doctor's office, pick up their child from school or just the ability to travel on the Village's roadway system. Plainfield area residents, already unhappy with daily congestion within the community, will now face additional obstacles crossing their path with daily freight trains. Unfortunately, the daily threat of rail traffic blocking a roadway may cause a driver to intentionally speed up and attempt to beat the train. Needless to say, driver frustration could increase the potential for greater risk-taking at rail crossings. As Police Chief, I can tell you we have had accidents at every grade crossing in town over the past 23 years and several have been fatal.

The Illinois Commerce Commission reports that train-vehicle collisions occur at highway-rail crossings throughout Illinois yearly. However, approximately forty-percent (40%) of all train-car collisions occur in the six-county region of northwestern Illinois (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will Counties). The majority of highway-rail crashes occur when the train is traveling less than 30mph, and within 25 miles of the victim(s) home. In addition, you are 40 times more likely to die in a crash with a train than you are to die in a crash with another automobile. (*ICC Operation Lifesaver Website*)

Our psychological makeup today does not favor calmness or patience when dealing with the unexpected or traffic-related inconveniences. Rail safety studies are indicating that basic signal improvements at crossings are having limited impact on crashes, as rail crash data indicate nearly half of the crossing collisions that occurred in the last 5 years occurred at crossings with active warning devices. More importantly, further reduction at some crossings will be difficult because railroad accident reports attributed 91 percent of collisions (over the last 5 years) to reckless or inattentive drivers. For example, drivers ignore warning signs or even drive around barriers as trains approach. (*Source: U.S. Dept of Transportation Railway Safety Report 2005*) Therefore, major consideration should be afforded at all high traffic locations by the STB to consider above/below grade crossings.

Another factor that must be taken into the equation is how this 300% increase in rail traffic will impact our school system and the safe movement of students and buses. Plainfield School District 202 is now the 3rd largest school district in the State of Illinois and utilizes over 400 buses daily to move students throughout the district. Each school bus must cross different segments of track daily, while many cross multiple times at different locations throughout the village. In addition, certain schools are in close proximity of the tracks and individual students will need to cross those busier track(s) daily to get to and from home to school.

The proposed purchase by CN will have a major impact on the EJ&E suburban communities who are ill-equipped to deal with the increased train traffic at rail crossings

which lack grade separation or effective stacking distances on roads to accommodate expected delays. Chicago and other suburban communities are fully aware of poor funding levels from the federal government and their inability to address rail crossing issues over the last 30 or so years.

Therefore, transferring the problem from one set of tracks to another is not in the best interest of public safety or the affected communities. This purchase will totally disrupt the lives of thousands of people, cause massive tie-ups of traffic and increased air pollution, plus increase the opportunity for more injuries and possible death from auto/train incidents.

The United States Surface Transportation Board (STB) should not support this project. We all know that federal funding will not be forthcoming, nor would major upgrades be accomplished quickly by the Canadian National Railway. In the long run, the taxpayers will be required to support any major improvements; while the profits from the rail use will go to CN shareholders.

The citizens of this great country deserve and expect those responsible for safe and effective rail service to protect our communities from unnecessary hazards and dangers.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald E. Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Donald" being the most prominent.

Donald E. Bennett
Chief of Police