

Dear Mr. Navecky,

I am writing to express some of the concerns I have with the proposed Great Lakes Basin Railroad. While I myself am pro-railroad (having a father who worked for Indiana Harbor Belt) and see the great benefits of consolidated freight movement, the proposed route could have many negative impacts which outweigh these benefits. Please find below a summary of some of these negatives:

1. **Transportation Systems:** The proposed route would cut through many north south county roads with at grade crossings. This would cause increased travel times throughout the area (in addition to environmental impacts that will be mentioned later). There are many existing railroad beds and crossings to the south of the proposed route that could be used as opposed to the higher populated Lake and Porter counties.
2. **Safety:** With the addition of multiple at grade crossings, train-vehicle collisions are bound to occur. There are many bicycle routes in the area which would also need to traverse these crossings.
3. **Land Use:** The land being along the proposed route is primarily farm land. Changes to this land by running tracks through them would have multiple impacts which affect this current use (changes to drainage and irrigation lines, changes in planting orientation reducing yields, and segregation of lots with limited access).
4. **Recreation:** As mentioned earlier bike routes would need to be revised to avoid crossings. A proposed South Porter County Park with multiple sport fields would be nearby the proposed route.
5. **Biological Resources:** The proposed route lies within the drainage basin which feed the Kankakee River. Changes to the drainage patterns in the area could have impact to the habitats of many of the native species that inhabit the area.
6. **Water Resources:** Changes to drainage patterns could also affect ground water levels in the area. Many residents and farms along the proposed route rely on ground water through wells and existing water table level to provide drinking water and irrigation. Perhaps the most devastating impact the project could have on water resources would be to affect the water usage for Nipsco's Schahfer Generating Station. This power plant which is the largest in North West Indiana provides electricity for many. It relies on the Kankakee River and ground wells for its necessary water. Currently the plant faces forced reduction in production when river levels are low due to periods of little rainfall. Changes to drainage patterns could worsen these forced reductions, leading to additional issues to be mentioned later.
7. **Navigation:** There should be very little impact to navigable waterways.
8. **Geology and Soils:** Bisecting farmlands and changing drainage patterns could cause erosion of highly valued productive top-soil that took many years to develop and maintain.
9. **Air Quality and Climate:** In addition to emissions released by increased train traffic, additional impact to the air quality would be caused by vehicles idling at grade crossings. As far as the hazards associated with environmentally dangerous cargo such as oil, gasoline, and other chemicals—there is not a question of whether a derailment will occur, but when one will occur causing a release of potentially environmentally hazardous cargo.

10. Noise and Vibration: Residents, businesses, and public buildings near the route are bound to experience additional noise and vibration from traffic. Studies have shown that even small amounts of noise and vibration can be distracting for people that experience it—leading to health and behavioral problems. This issue could have a potential impact on the Morgan Township School. This may also affect production from animals (both domesticated and wild) that inhabit the area.
11. Energy Resources: As mentioned earlier, changing the operating patterns of the Nipsco power plant could greatly change the distribution of power in the area. Reduced local production of energy in times of high demand will drive up the cost of electricity as it will have to be purchased at a premium from other systems.
12. Socioeconomics: While construction of the railroad would lead to an influx of temporary construction jobs, after the project is complete, few workers would be needed to support the maintenance of the rail lines. It could be that increased rail line traffic could have negative impacts of the trucking industry that operates in the area. Any industry that is looking at developing property in the area already has access to rail lines and could add spurs to connect to the existing lines in the area. Potential increase in energy costs could affect the many residents and businesses that operate in Nipsco's service territory.
13. Cultural and Historic Resources: The proposed route passes near Buckley Homestead in Lowell. This property has been a great resource for schools and tourists in the area. A high traffic train route nearby would likely deter visitors.
14. Aesthetics: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder—I would think that anyone who sees land (whether it be open farmland or a small wetland) that is familiar to them change would be for the addition of rail lines through that land.
15. Environmental Justice: It could be argued that the proposed route passes through the lands of one of the smaller minority groups in the United States—independent farmers. The number of farmers decreases each year as the average age of farmers still in operation increases. Increased stress on the lifestyle of this group is not needed. Changes to the land which is their livelihood could lead to further reduction of the population of farmers able to provide for their families and continue to provide for all consumers.

The above list points out just some of the major impacts the proposed rail line could have on this area. If deemed to be a necessity, I believe there should be a more suitable alternative route found. It would seem like existing train lines could be widened and tied to a combination of some new and rebuilt rail easements. I am not a transportation planner or engineer, but common sense would say that if rails so many rails were removed due to lack of use, they could be put back in use if the need has returned or is foreseen—without having to bisect prime land and potentially impact many other resources.

Sincerely,

Pete Nemeth