



Blue Island Area

Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ruth Sheahan

September 29, 2008

Phillis Johnson-Ball
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423
Re: STB Finance Docket No. 35087

Dear Ms. Johnson-Ball:

On behalf of the Blue Island Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to submit comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement that was issued in July 2008 on the proposed acquisition of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway by the Canadian National Railroad.

Blue Island was established in 1835 as a way station for Chicago travelers on the historic Vincennes Trail. In the 1870s, the Rock Island Railroad marked the beginning of Blue Island's transformation into a trade hub. Blue Island's early 20th century history was dominated by heavy industry-food processing, oil refining, brick making and railroads. In the latter half of the century, much of the city's heavy industry was replaced with service and retail businesses however the railroads remain.

Blue Island business owners and residents understand that the rail industry is both a blessing and a burden. The city is a crossroads of several major railroads including Metra commuter rail and CSX railroad. These railways generate jobs and economic development. On the flip side, the rail traffic along grade crossings in the community limit access to our retail businesses, endanger students at area schools who have been known to crawl under stopped trains to get to and from school, hinder police and fire response to emergency calls and delay residents and workers.

Our goal as a chamber is to provide opportunities and services to enhance and promote businesses for the benefit of our membership. The Blue Island business community is a vital group of thousands of workers who operate hundreds of progressive companies and the Chamber effectively promotes Blue Island as a great place to live, work, and run a business. For this reason, we feel it's important that we urge the Surface Transportation Board, in issuing its final Environmental Impact Statement, to consider the positive impacts of this transaction on the City of Blue Island, its residents and businesses.

The CN acquisition of the EJ&E means that rail congestion in Chicago and nearby suburbs will decrease. Decreased congestion means that freight trains can move through grade crossings faster. Blue Island is home to the CSX switching yard which means that

trains often must enter the yard very slowly or idle north of the yard waiting for clearance to proceed. The result is long delays at grade crossings and increased noise and air pollution caused by idling trains.

Second, the proposed acquisition will mean fifteen fewer trains passing through Blue Island. In a community with nearly 100 trains passing through on a daily basis, fifteen fewer trains would be a welcome relief.

Lastly, as mentioned above, the rail industry has historically been a major employer in our community, and we do not want to see freight train congestion result in rail companies moving their operations to other Midwestern cities like Memphis. For the economic future of the Chicago region, we need this and future measures to decrease the congestion that threatens to drive the rail industry away.

In closing, we strongly urge the STB to make a decision quickly. Delaying a decision could jeopardize this proposed acquisition and, in essence, kill CN's ability to close on the deal before the December 31, 2008 deadline set by the current owner, U.S. Steel.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ruth Sheahan", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Ruth Sheahan
Executive Director