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Elaine Nekritz

State Representative • 57th District

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**Surface Transportation Board Hearings
Finance Docket No. 35087**

Written Testimony of State Representative Elaine Nekritz

Good evening. I am State Representative Elaine Nekritz. I represent parts of six communities in the north and northwest suburbs.

Local, Regional and National Impacts

The current CN line runs through 3 of the communities I represent: Des Plaines, Mount Prospect and Prospect Heights, so my constituents know all too well the impact that freight rail has on the motoring public, including emergency vehicles.

Which is why we would very much welcome the relief that the proposed acquisition could provide – even for a few years. CN is projecting that their existing line will see a *reduction* in trains from 19 to 2 per day in the northwest suburbs. Furthermore, the CN estimates approximately 80 communities will see a reduction in trains while 34 will see an increase.

Yet the draft Environmental Impact Statement gives short shrift to the positive community and environmental impacts along the existing CN lines. For example, it seems that the wait time for vehicles stopped at grade crossings along the existing CN lines are completely ignored in the calculation of energy use and air quality and climate in the Executive Summary.

Furthermore, over the last ten years, communities along all freight lines have experienced dramatic increases in train traffic. Because freight railroads already owned those lines, they did not seek permission to increase the number of trains, nor did they provide any mitigation. And there are few, if any, existing grade separations and almost no funding for new projects. In Des Plaines, for example (a community of approximately 59,000) there are 32 at grade crossings and only 2 bridges.

So while I support mitigation, I find it difficult to justify that, with limited resources for grade separations, communities which would just now feel the impacts of more trains would go to the front of the line to receive funding for mitigation while those who have been dealing with this issue for decades continue to wait and wait and wait.

I also serve as the Chair of the Illinois House of Representatives Rail Committee. As such, I would like to point out that there is also a regional economic perspective to this potential acquisition that is significant. Chicagoland is the world's fifth largest intermodal freight hub (we used to be third not that long ago). The movement of freight is a huge economic engine in our regional economy. The rail industry alone employs almost 9000 people in northeastern Illinois and many thousands more are working in the warehousing, distribution and logistics sectors.

Unfortunately, investment in the necessary transportation infrastructure has lagged to the point where rail and truck traffic is so congested it is reaching a breaking point. Rather than looking to Chicagoland as a freight hub, many companies are being lured by Kansas City, Memphis and others – all of which are actively seeking these significant investments.

The Chicago Department of Transportation, the Illinois Department of Transportation and the six Class I railroads in the Chicago region came together a few years ago to work on a plan to relieve rail and traffic congestion. The result was the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE). CREATE was conceived as a \$1.5 billion public-private partnership.

In the last federal transportation bill, CREATE received only \$100 million and the state has yet to come up with any money. While we continue to haggle over taxpayer funding for critical congestion relief, the CN is offering a purely private sector solution.

All manner of consumer goods – from shoes to food to cars – are transported by train. It is the most economically and environmentally efficient form of transportation. In the global economy, which is dependent upon transporting goods quickly and reliably, freight trains are a fact of life. The CN proposal deserves a fair review that considers all factors, including the positive regional traffic and economic benefits.

Impact on Illinois Passenger Rail Service

Each year, the State of Illinois makes a significant investment in passenger rail service provided by Amtrak. One of the most successful lines runs between Chicago and Carbondale. This route currently operates on CN track known as the St. Charles Air Line (Air Line). In its filing, CN has indicated that they plan on abandoning the Air Line. The alternative identified by CN, however, requires an investment of approximately \$30 to \$35 million. Currently, there is no funding source that has been identified for that investment. I ask the STB to require a mutually acceptable agreement between Amtrak and CN regarding the maintenance of the Air Line.

Impact on Mass Transit

The EJ&E line has been identified as a proposed route for suburb to suburb commuter train service in the Chicago region. This project, known as the Star Line, would be the first of its kind in the area. Increased freight traffic on the EJ&E will have a significant impact on both the cost of implementing the Star Line and its future operations. Should there need to be a second track constructed to accommodate the Star Line, the cost could be prohibitive.

In addition to the Star Line, increased traffic along the EJ&E line will impact other mass transit services that intersect with that line.

These impacts on new and existing mass transit services should be considered for mitigation conditions in the Environmental Impact Statement.

Elaine Nekritz – 57th District
State Representative
Chair, House Railroad Committee