

Danielle Gosselin
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

February 17, 2009

Attention: Environmental Filing
STB Finance Docket No. 35116

Dear Danielle Gosselin,

I am a resident of Centre County, Pennsylvania in which the proposed project STB Finance Docket No. 35116 is located. I was born and raised in the area which will be affected by this proposed railroad line reactivation, and I have the following comments against the proposal.

Item 1. Transportation and Safety

Pedestrian Vehicular Concerns:

There are far too many grade level railroad crossing across small windy rural roads. The large number of crossings numbering 16 crossings along 20 miles of track presents a crossing for every 1.25 miles of rural road. This is really excessive and dangerous. These crossings will present hazards closely adjacent to a large number of community villages. Actually seven rural villages will be affected including Wallacetown, Morrisdale, Oak Grove, Allport, Munson, Forest, and Winburne. This rail traffic will negatively impact and present safety hazards to vehicular traffic, pedestrians, bicyclists, and children at play.

Close Proximity to Residential Structures:

The seven villages including Wallacetown, Morrisdale, Oak Grove, Allport, Munson, Forest, and Winburne that are adjacent to the proposed rail line are home to many families with small children. The many railroad crossings and the proximity of a heavy rail line to residential areas will cause a significant safety hazard to this peaceful, rural community area. The project anticipates at least two large trains to travel daily through this area.

Consistency with Local and Regional Transportation Goals:

The proposed rail line serves no other purpose than to transport trash to a proposed landfill. There are no additional local or regional transportation goals that are met. There is very strong local and regional opposition to the proposed landfill which may never go into operation. There are many environmental concerns with the landfill itself. With no landfill, there is absolutely no use for this proposed rail line.

There is also a strong conflict between the land use and transportation plans of Snow Shoe Township, Rush Township, and Clearfield Township concerning this proposal.

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Item 2. Land Use

Impact to Existing Land Use:

The proposed rail line will devalue local land as residential property. No one wants to buy a house adjacent to a heavily used rail line.

The area along the abandoned rail line is currently primarily residential land use.

The region land is also used as a recreational area for hunting, fishing, camping, biking, hiking, and other outdoor activities. Existing land use as a recreational area will be seriously compromised by the proposed rail line.

The Snow Shoe Rail to Trails area will be decimated and will no longer be an attractive recreational and tourist area.

Item 5. Noise

High Decibel Noise Impacts:

Heavy rail trains are inherently noisy. The train rumble in a rural area with very low ambient noise levels will present a significant impact to local residents. The high level of grade level crossings at 16 crossings over a 20 mile line will mean that train whistles will be sounded along the entire length of the line. The sounding of train whistles at high decibel levels is a very significant noise impact to this rural area, home to seven community villages.

The area that will be impacted by the train noise is also considered to be a wilderness area and part of the Pennsylvania State Forest, including the Black Moshannon State Park which is considered to be a jewel in the PA State Park system. This land is home to many wild animals including Ospreys, Bluebirds, Wood Ducks, White Tail Deer, Black Bear, Fox, Beavers and many other woodland creatures which will all be impacted negatively by the noise of the rail line.

There are also many camps including old cabins used as seasonal properties for the enjoyment of the rural peace and quiet which attracts tourists and recreational sportsmen to the area. This tourism and sportsman industry will be severely impacted by the noise of this rail line.

The unusual bowl like topography leading into the Black Moshannon State Park and Wildlife Refuge/Natural Areas will allow the noise from the proposed rail line to propagate clearly into this sensitive area.

Item 6. Biological Resources

Impact on Terrestrial Habitats, Aquatic Habitats, and Wildlife Species:

The proposed rail line will negatively impact the biological resources of the area. The area impacted by the rail line has a great deal of natural wildlife and is home to many wild animals including Ospreys, Bluebirds, Wood Ducks, White Tail Deer, Black Bear, Fox, Beavers, and many other woodland creatures. The rail line will be detrimental to this

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wildlife which is bound to fall prey to the force of the train as the creatures cross the railroad line.

The rail line crosses pristine streams which are home to several species of trout including Brook Trout, and Rainbow Trout. The construction and operation of the rail line will degrade the quality of the water and affect the fish populations in the area.

The Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*, is a threatened species and has nesting sites in the area. The Wood Duck, *Aix sponsa*, once threatened with near extinction, are one of North America's most recognizable and celebrated waterfowl and have many nesting sites in the area.

The Eastern Bluebird, *Sialia sialis*, declined seriously enough in the past century to reach critical status by the mid-1900s. The Eastern Bluebird has many nest box sites in the area.

Impact on Wildlife Sanctuaries, State Forests, State Parks, and State Game Lands:

The proposed rail line will negatively impact Wildlife Sanctuaries, State Forests, State Parks, and State Game Lands. The Black Moshannon State Park includes large designated Wilderness Areas, a large lake, hiking, fishing, hunting, swimming, boating, camping, and picnic areas. The Black Moshannon Lake, wetland areas, and surrounding forest are home to many wildlife species and rare plant species. The proposed rail line is adjacent to State game lands and the Black Moshannon State Forest. The proposed rail line is very close to the Black Moshannon State Park, Wilderness Areas, and Wildlife Refuge.

Many local volunteers spend countless hours to help maintain and preserve the pristine jewel of Black Moshannon State Park and Black Moshannon State Forest as a home to many wild animals for the enjoyment of all Americans.

The Black Moshannon State Park and Black Moshannon State Forest are home to barn and tree swallows, mallards, Canada geese, beaver, muskrat, great blue heron, wood ducks, migrating loons, mergansers, scaup, oldsquaw, grebe, whistling swans, and snow geese. The area is also home to deer, raccoon, opossum, porcupine, flying squirrels, woodpeckers, turkey, grouse, hawks, fox, weasel, bobcat, coyote, ravens, kingfishers, salamanders, crayfish and trout.

In 1994, Pennsylvania gave additional protection to a 1,592-acre collection of unique and scenic bogs, marshes, swamp and forests by designating it as the Black Moshannon Bog Natural Area. This special area is one of the best examples of a bog ecosystem in the Allegheny Plateau region. It was designation as a State Park Natural Area to assure that its ecological values are preserved.

All of the species listed above, the designated Natural Areas, and the Wildlife Sanctuary areas will be detrimentally affected by the proposed rail line and landfill.

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Item 8. Socioeconomics

Impact on Existing Local and Regional Socioeconomics, Population, Housing, and Employment:

The only purpose of the proposed rail line is to serve as access to a proposed major landfill. The multiple daily incursion of a large, heavily loaded trash train travelling through a rural village area in order to dump huge volumes of toxic and hazardous trash into the pit of an abandoned surface coal mine will certainly not raise the socioeconomic standing of the local population but will negatively impact that standing.

Housing and property values will certainly decrease due to the activation of the proposed rail line and landfill.

There may be some reduction to employment at food establishments, campgrounds, and motels due to a reduction in tourism to the area.

Item 9. Recreation

Impact on Public and Private Recreational Facilities:

The proposed rail line will have a dramatic negative impact to a very popular local and regional recreational area, the Snow Shoe Rail Trail Bicycling and Hiking Path. Many Pennsylvania State, local, and regional agencies, public support groups, local property owners, and volunteers have worked long and hard to develop the Snow Shoe Rail Trail. This rail trail, over 19 miles in length, is a keystone in the reclamation of this beautiful Allegheny Plateau scenic area, which had been devastated in the past by poorly regulated surface coal mining. It will be a hard blow to the local, regional, and National population to have this Rail Trail snatched away by the activation of a shortsighted proposal for a rail line and landfill.

Over 9 miles of the Snow Shoe Rail Trail will be directly destroyed if the proposed rail line activation takes place and the remainder of the line will suffer from loss of use and environmental degradation due to noise pollution from the train and from the detrimental effects of an adjacent landfill.

Other public and private recreational areas that will be negatively impacted include the Black Moshannon State Park Recreational Areas, local trout streams, trails, cabins, hunting camps, and camping areas.

These areas presently offer serene and peaceful hiking, fishing, hunting, cross country skiing, biking, camping, picnics, nature walks, boating, bird watching, and meditative contemplation, all of which will be disrupted by the proposed rail line and landfill.

The Snow Shoe Park Corporation camping facility, the Woodland Campgrounds, the Black Moshannon State Park campground, Cherry Ridge Cabins, and local motels will all have a negative impact due to loss of tourism and outdoor recreationalists no longer coming to the area.

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Item 10. Environmental Justice

Impact on Local and Regional Low Income Populations:

The 2000 census shows the median income for a household in Rush township was \$35,239, and the median income for a family was \$39,826. Males had a median income of \$32,067 versus \$20,302 for females. The per capita income for the township was \$15,683. About 4.0% of families and 6.9% of the population were below the poverty line, including 9.2% of those under age 18 and 7.4% of those age 65 or over.

The 2000 census shows the median income for a household in Snow Shoe township was \$31,429, and the median income for a family was \$37,750. Males had a median income of \$28,801 versus \$21,806 for females. The per capita income for the township was \$16,374. About 5.3% of families and 9.2% of the population were below the poverty line, including 9.3% of those under age 18 and 8.3% of that age 65 or over.

In 2006, the median household income in the United States was around \$46,000.

These figures show that the residents of Rush and Snow Shoe Townships are well below the National median income.

The reactivation of a heavy rail line and the approval of a major landfill will only drag down the quality of life and the property values of the local residents who are already negatively affected by their socioeconomic status.

Item 11. Geology and Soils

Status of Coal Mining Operations:

The geology of the area is known as the Allegheny Front Plateau. Significant bituminous coal beds near the surface encouraged widespread and heavy surface strip mining in the area. The original purpose and use of the rail lines were for the transportation of coal from the mining operations.

The proposed rail line passes through areas that underwent heavy surface mining for coal. Many of the surface mining areas have been only poorly or marginally reclaimed.

Item 12. Cultural/Historic Resources

Project Impacts to Local Historic Districts:

There are several designated Historic Districts nearby to the proposed rail line and landfill. These designated Historic Districts include:

The Black Moshannon State Park Day Use District, **Centre County** - #87000101, which contains 900 acres, 7 buildings, and 11 structures, with the Historic Function as Outdoor Recreation, Landscape, and Culture;

The Black Moshannon State Park Family Cabin District, **Centre County** - #87000102, which contains 165 acres and 16 buildings with Historic Function as Domestic and Landscape; and

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The Black Moshannon State Park Maintenance District, **Centre County** - #87000097, which contains 28 acres and 4 buildings with Historic Function as Event, Architecture/Engineering.

These three Historic Districts are primarily for outdoor recreation and draw many tourists and outdoorsmen to the area. The proposed rail line will have negative impact on these historic areas due to noise impact and the loss of the nearby Snow Shoe Rail Trail.

Item 13. Cumulative and Indirect Impacts

Cumulative Impacts to the Environment:

There is a significant cumulative impact to the area when added to the past environmental damage of poorly regulated surface coal mining in the area.

The rail line will contribute heavy noise pollution to the area, disruption and degradation of streams during the construction process, and ongoing degradation and pollution from the operation of the rail line and heavy trash trains.

The project purpose is to provide access to a proposed major landfill for trash disposal. This proposed landfill will have a very severe negative impact to the local and regional environment from air pollution, surface water pollution, and groundwater pollution.

Approval of the rail line will enable the landfill project to proceed and so directly contributes to the cumulative negative impact on the local and regional environment.

In summary, please carefully consider all of the points addressed above. The proposal for the reactivation of this rail line and the proposed landfill it will serve has a large local and Regional opposition. There is only a small group with vested interests that favor this proposal. This proposal is not in the interest of the Region and will be detrimental to the health, safety, and quality of life of the local populace. This proposal will also be detrimental to the environment, the recreational facilities, the wildlife, the Historic Districts, the Natural Areas, State Forests, and the Wildlife Refuge Areas adjacent to the proposed rail line and landfill.

I was unable to attend the recent STB scoping meeting held in Philipsburg, PA concerning STB Finance Docket No. 35116 proposed rail line reactivation due to my work schedule. I wish to go on record as adamantly opposed to the rail line reactivation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Thomas Roberts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

David Thomas Roberts
1995 Valley View Road
Bellefonte, PA 16823