

Larry and Patricia Kirchner

5020 N. 9000 W. Rd
Bonfield, IL 60913

June 14, 2016

Dave Navecky
Surface Transportation Board
DOCKET No.: FD 35952
395 E. Street SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Dear Mr. Navecky,

As land owners in the area of the proposed route of the Great Lakes Basin Transportation (GLBT), Inc. project, we are writing to express our concerns which should be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement regarding the construction and operation of the rail line, rail port and utility easement. We have attempted to categorize them according to the Impact Categories provided for Scoping Comments:

Transportation System

- This project is not part or nor does it attempt to integrate with CREATE; a joint venture between Federal, State and local government entities, rail lines and private business to improve the transportation community in and around Chicago. Will the investment to date in CREATE and their projects be wasted? Will this project divert funds from CREATE? Can completed and proposed CREATE projects be considered as an alternative to the GLBT route?
- AMTRACK Blue Ribbon Report dated October 2015 has other alternatives listed for congestion relief. Have the routes their report been considered as an alternative?
- Can existing rail lines and/or easements be used for portions of the route? For example, the Norfolk Southern Rail Line runs parallel to and south of the proposed GLBT line in the western part of Kankakee County, IL.
- Union Pacific publicly stated that they are working closely with CREATE and have no interest in the GLBT project. Norfolk Southern Railroad has also stated they will not be participating in the GLBT freight line. How many Class-1 Railways have shown an interest in this project? Is there enough interest to make this project viable? Even GLBT has been quoted as saying "there is not enough business for a single railroad to justify the project economically".

- How will President Obama's Executive Order – Steps to Increase Competition and Better Inform Consumers and Workers to Support Continued Growth of the American Economy and New Transportation impact the financial projections of GLBT proposal? Will projected rates and revenues be changed? Will the new regulation impact competition or force cooperation between existing railroads? Will these regulations and forced cooperation make this project unnecessary?
- Will this project, in conflict with President Obama's Executive Order above, actually eliminate competition and lead to consolidation of existing railways? Will this route give an unfair competitive advantage to one railway over another?
- If investors of the GLBT are unknown, how does the STB evaluate the impact of an "unknown entity" controlling a U.S. Railway? Will a foreign entity own a major strategic transportation system? How does this impact homeland security and our national defense?
- Can a foreign entity apply for and be granted RRIF funds to build a railway?
- What is the impact on existing roads as an efficient transportation method for commuters, school buses, emergency traffic, and business/agriculture transportation? We suggest an analysis to determine the impact on travel times and safety with resulting financial and health risk of by each type of road/highway user.
- We have one of the largest rural school districts in the State of Illinois, Herscher School District Unit #2. Numerous bus routes will cross the rail line. What factors need to be considered to ensure that our children are first and foremost, safe and second, not left in buses for long periods of time and finally that there is no disruption in the school day due to delays at rail crossings?
- GLBT promises future construction of railroad spurs. We have a number of abandoned/unused rail spurs in industrial complexes in Kankakee County. Former sites of A.O. Smith, Bradley Roper, Kankakee Roper and soon closing Bunge Oil, just to name a few. Is there an economic demand for more spurs?
- Do trains carrying hazardous materials, High-Hazard Flammable Trains (HHFT), have priority over non-hazardous freight trains? If so, does that mean trains carrying grain or agricultural inputs, our priority as an agricultural community, would be sidelined or delayed by this project?
- GLBT states their trains could travel at speeds up to 70 mph. Are there new safety rules regarding maximum speed limits, particularly for HHFT? How does this affect GLBT efficiency and financial projections?

- Will this project be integrated with any of the new intermodal facilities in the area (Elwood, Wilmington, Manhattan/Monee, Joliet, etc.) or does it ignore the existing capital investment?
- Proposed rail line includes a 50 foot easement for utilities which have nothing to do with transportation. Is this under the jurisdiction of the STB? Does the STB have the power to grant such an easement? Does this fall under the jurisdiction of another Federal Department, possibly the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, or another department with different rules, requirements and possibly another Impact Study focused specifically on the type of utility or pipeline proposed?
- The GLBT web site states that the 50 foot easement would be a “revenue generator for them”. Is it legal under federal and state law for a railroad to take adjacent land and then not use it for the intended purpose of the railroad? Does a railroad have the right under fed/state utility laws to provide electric service to residents, as promised? We contacted the Illinois Commerce Commission and they stated they “have nothing to do with the GLBT project”.

Safety

- According to the literature, the goal of the line to avoid major population centers - Is freight targeted for new line hazardous type materials sent through our rural community to avoid mass casualty and environmental disaster in area of major population centers? Analysis and projections as to potential loss of life and projected property damage for an incident should be completed.
- With the addition of nine (9) at grade crossings just in our township (Salina) and undetermined number of Private Road Crossings for property access, what are the safety risks to drivers, farmers, train personnel and livestock?
- Accidents may result in a spill from a train, vehicle or agricultural equipment. Are there statistics available for potential accidents based on population or traffic at each crossing – public and private?
- Based upon the risks identified in the analysis above:
 - Will the railroad pay for additional first responders due to potential hazards from the train and utility easements?
 - What additional equipment will be provided to first responders to address potential issues such as spills, leaks, derailment, accidents, etc.?
 - Our volunteer fire department, the Salina Township Fire Protection District, lacks the specialized training required to deal with the new

potential risks. What training and compensation will be provided to first responders who currently volunteer their time to help their neighbors?

- The rail line/utility easement will cause delays in medical, fire and police response due to trains at rail crossings while the rail line is being constructed and during operation. Will the railroad build another fire station and staff it on the other side of the tracks?
- Can we be assured as published in the literature, that the At Grade Road Crossing are equipped with road flashers and gates and bells and are “quiet zones”? What is the Risk Index (RI) for the At Grade Crossing with no whistle? Is the crossing of large, slow moving farm equipment factored into the calculation of the RI?
- Our county sheriff, Kankakee County Sheriff Department, is currently short staffed due to financial budget constraints. Our response times are hampered by distance now, what happens when they are delayed by trains? What is the impact on public safety and potential loss of life? What analysis has been done from a law enforcement perspective?
- The rail line passes within 1 mile of the local grade school, Bonfield Grade School, educating 325+ pre-school through 2nd grade students. What are the risks to our children? Is there a plan for hazardous materials accidents? Are students to shelter in place or are evacuation routes determined for schools located so close to the route? Are educators’ part of the safety training provided to the community?
- Many houses, businesses and farm buildings are built on sandstone foundations. Will these buildings collapse with the vibration of the trains? Who will repair the foundations of these structures if they are deemed at risk or are damaged? The Impact Study should identify these at risk structures.
- In the event of an accident, who is responsible and who is liable for the damages, cleanup and restoration? Will the responsibility fall back on the local community? If the community is responsible, an analysis should be done to determine the economic impact of the cleanup and restoration.
- What are the rules for notification regarding a spill? What is the timing? How large of a spill is considered reportable? How soon are responders, public officials and the general public notified? We can see by the Flint Michigan crisis that more safe guards need to be in place between agencies. This community has already suffered private well contamination due to a Shell Oil spill in 1988.
- Does the proximity of the rail road and utility easement impact our homeowner, farm/ranch or business insurance rates? If so, how are we compensated if our land is not actually part of the easement purchased?

Insurance companies authorized to sell homeowner insurance in our area should be consulted and area landowners should be informed as to impacts to their coverage and future rates.

- If there is a major accident, does the State of Illinois have the power to declare a “natural disaster” and become eligible for Federal funds or are rail accidents excluded from this designation?
- GLBT states their trains would be traveling at 70 mph. Are there safety rules regarding maximum limits, particularly for HHFT? Will HHFT's be permitted to travel at 70 mph on the new rail lines? Is this a safe speed?
- Railroads have been mandated to use safer tank cars through the Tank Car Safety Regulations. Will GLBT allow non-compliant tank cars on the new line? If so, does this increase the risk of accident and/or release?
- Will GLBT use Positive Train Control (PTC)? Failure to use PTC should be factored into the safety analysis.

Land Use

- Currently information states removal of approximately 16,000 acres from agricultural production in Kankakee County. How many additional acres will permanently be lost from agricultural production due to:
 - Maintenance roads, private crossings and parcels too small to farm?
 - Borrow pits required to maintain the desired 1% grade of the rail line?
- In addition to the above, how many more acres will temporarily be removed from agricultural production during initial construction of the rail line?
- As the rail line cuts parcels into odd shapes and prevents access to certain parcels, GLBT states they will build Private Crossings. Due to the size of large farm equipment, Private Crossings will need to be long and wide with gradual inclines to safely cross the tracks and easement. As asked above, how many more acres will this include? Will GLBT be required to compensate landowners for the repurposed land?
- Also related, if the Private Crossings are not wide enough or too steep, farm equipment will have to be taken apart just to travel across the tracks resulting in additional lost productivity for the farmer. Who pays that cost?
- Of the acres impacted, either permanently or temporarily, how many acres are enrolled in Federal or State conservation practices with the United States

Department of Agriculture or the Illinois Department of Natural Resources?
Examples of some of the many programs include:

- Conservation Reserve Programs (CRP)
- Conservation Security Programs (CSP)
- Conservation Reserve Enhanced Program (CREP).

Who pays financially for the breach of the contracts? Will the landowner and/or farmer be compensated for the loss of revenue related to the current and future contracts? Will the landowner/farmer be barred from participating in future USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) or State of Illinois programs?

- What is the reason for GLBT's land grab of 15,000 acres for a rail port near Manteno, IL? This new rail port is more than five times the size of other rail ports in the United States:
 - Bailey Yard in Nebraska is the largest in the country with a total expanse of 2,850 acres over 8 miles long and 2 miles wide.
 - Argentine Yard in Kansas is the second largest classification yard in the country and covers 780 acres.
 - Robert Young Yard in Elkhart, IN occupies 675 acres and is 4 miles long.
 - CSX Yard in Hopkinsville, KY is 280 acres with 10 rails side by side.

What is the **transportation** need for such a large area? If you take land from private land owners for transportation doesn't it need to be used for the transportation? To minimize the impact on the agricultural community can the rail port and related transportation businesses be reduced?

- GLBT has stated many times that the route can change. When is the route finally determined and by whom? If the route changes, there may be other environmental impacts.
- If GLBT sells the easement to a utility company or pipeline, does another study need to be done to determine the impact of having the new utility or pipeline located on the property as it relates to the land use? For example, if a pipeline is to be constructed, would all dirt related work be contained to the easement or would adjacent land be impacted during the construction phase of the project?
- Kankakee County will lose at least 16,000 acres out of agriculture. Will the loss of so much prime farmland require USDA approval?
- If a portion of our land is taken for the project and our remaining parcel is non-conforming to local ordinances, how are we protected or compensated? Will Kankakee County provide an exception with no cost to the land owner?

Recreation

- With the loss of Kankakee River State Park land, a study should be conducted to determine the impact on camping and fishing as well as the walking and biking paths in the area of the rail line bridge over the Kankakee River?
- Can the Federal Government take land that is designated as a State Park as being proposed with the Kankakee River State Park?
- The railroad easements will enable, illegal access to private property adjacent to the easement. What can be done to prevent trespassing and illegal hunting on private property?
- Quiet enjoyment of property – walking, observing nature, mental health of property owners. This project has created anxiety and issues for many of the people along the route. Landowners grew up on or moved to the country to be away from the hustle and bustle of the city and now you want to run trains right next to our homes and through our farms. What study will be done to determine the impact on the health and welfare of the landowner and their right to enjoy their own property as it was purchased?
- The U.S. Department of Interior just designated the entire length of the Kankakee River as a National Recreation Trail. This designation was to preserve the river and protect its natural habitat and beauty. What effect would this project have on this designation and the preservation of the river in both Illinois and Indiana?
- How is ecotourism and travel to our area going to be effected by the project? How will you preserve the natural beauty for activities like birding, hiking and nature photography?
- If the Kankakee River becomes contaminated by a release, what happens to businesses that rely on the river for boat rentals, camp sites and fishing trips? A study needs to be completed to determine the impact on these businesses.

Biological Resources

- Analysis should be conducted to determine the impact on wildlife (mammals, birds and insects) with destruction of habitat and repurposing of the land. Will this increase animal mortality? Will it reduce biodiversity?
- Some land is currently enrolled in Federal Conservation Reserve and Land Stewardship Programs including wetland restorations, and pollinator programs. What will be the impact of this project on these programs at the federal, state and county level?
- What is the potential harm to wildlife and destruction of wildlife habitat due to hazardous release, not just in the immediate area, but due to water

contamination in the Kankakee River watershed? Analysis should be conducted to determine potential impacts and mitigation strategy of such a release.

- Construction of the rail line and utility easement will fragment and block wildlife habitat, segmenting various populations. The project will eliminate free travel and destroy habitat for wildlife. It will also pose a danger to wildlife being struck by high speed trains. One mitigation strategy would be to build safe, dry travel accesses (i.e. tunnels, bridges) for reduces fragmentation of habitat and provide safe travel of wildlife.
- In addition to trees and vegetation permanently eliminated by the development of the rail line and utility easement, how will the trees and vegetation be protected along the right of way during construction and on-going maintenance of the line and easement?
- In May, 2016 the Midwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service revived the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. They are in the early stages of a Land Protection Plan (LPP). They are acquiring land and easements in a broad community based partnership between Illinois and Indiana. How does this project effect the Kankakee River Basin Conservation Project under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?
- The EIS should also clearly define parties responsible and liable for loss of wildlife and habitat in the event of a release or accident.

Water Resources

- Contamination of ground water caused by runoff of chemicals used on railroad would be catastrophic. Ground water is the primary source of water including drinking water for most rural residents and their livestock. It is also used for irrigation of cropland and gardens in many parts of Kankakee County. What are the risks should an accident happen, who cleans it up? We had a similar problem in the Kankakee County with the contamination of ground water due to the 1988 Shell Oil spill.
- Direct contamination of the Kankakee River caused by runoff or release of chemicals into the river in and around the river crossing at Warner Bridge could permanently damage the river as a source of drinking water. The STB should identify potential issues and how to address potential problems.
- Construction and operation of the project will damage, disrupt and force rerouting of surface and ground water. Study should be done to determine the impact on the water and drainage during normal and heavy rains.
- Our farm drainage tiles are unmapped and many are old clay tiles which have become very fragile and will not survive excess vibration caused by construction and operation of the rail lines. Analysis will need to be done to

find the tiles and replace them as necessary. Prior experience with pipelines and windmills projects tell us many tiles will be missed and damage is not immediately apparent. GLBT should be required to set up a fund for future rerouting, replacement or repair of affected tiles.

- A disruption in the tiling system or broken tile could be financially devastating to a farmer. How does the rail way propose to run tiles under tracks? Is that possible? If the drainage egress is on the other side of the tracks how do you propose to get the water off the land? How can you restore proper drainage when the elevation and the natural run off of water would preclude doing so?
- Who pays for the testing of private wells if there is contamination? Is the water safe for human consumption? Is the water safe for our livestock? How often is the Kankakee River going to be tested for contamination? Is the testing voluntary or regulated? Who is responsible for testing: the railroad, the EPA, Illinois Department of Natural Resources?

Navigation

- February 2014 existing County Road 20/N7000 Road West Bridge (Warner Bridge) across the Kankakee River was closed for several weeks due to ice jams. When this recurs, what will be the impact to rail line operation? What will be the impact on the operation of utilities using the easement? Who would be responsible for checking the safety of the bridge?
- What are the impacts on the Kankakee River primarily during construction? Will boating, fishing, recreation be impacted during this time?

Geology and Soils

- Our soils are some of the most productive in the United States and maybe the world. They are also our way of making a living. What happens if an accident destroys our soils? How will we make a living? Analysis should be done to determine the impact.
- During construction and maintenance, heavy equipment will cross our soils causing compaction which decreases soil productivity. How will this be corrected? Will landowners and farmers be compensated for their losses?
- Township road commissioners struggle to maintain roads built on peat ground. Will these same soil types support a rail line?
- Has a complete geological study been done to study earthquake faults along the route? In Illinois you have an earthquake rider on your homeowner policy.
- In our area, you also have a mine subsidence rider on your homeowner policy because of all the underground mining of coal. Are there any abandoned

mines under the proposed path of these trains? Many of these mines and properties are not identifiable on maps.

- During construction heavy equipment would need to travel on our roads. Many of our roads are tar and chip and are “posted roads” for several months in the winter. A posted road has weight limits and even some school buses are restricted on some of the county roads during this time. Is this factored into the planning? If damage is done by these heavy trucks who pays to resurface our roads?

Air Quality and Climate

- Who monitors the fumes and air pollution caused by running, stopped or idling trains? What devices will be in place along the route? Will this information be accessible by the public and/or by our local officials?
- Who monitors litter and other forms of pollution from the railroad and utility people themselves along the line? You see this problem along existing tracks in Kankakee County.
- Will rail cars be covered to prevent dust from leaving the rail cars and causing respiratory problems for residents along the line?
- Will this project decrease our economic benefit of living in a rural area? Will this lead to a less healthy lifestyle due to our natural environment being disrupted?

Noise and Vibration

- How will students at the Bonfield Grade School be impacted due to noise from movement of the train as well as bells located at At Grade Road Crossings? An analysis should be conducted to determine the impact on learning due to noise disruption.
- Many farm houses are built on sandstone foundations which will not withstand vibration caused by trains. Will these houses be rebuilt or replaced?
- Great Lakes Basin states they will implement all necessary safety precautions to ensure creation of quiet zones and eliminate whistling for crossings except in emergencies. How can we be assured this will happen?
- Noise pollution by frequent trains negatively impacts the surrounding land and lowers the property assessed valuation. How will we be compensated for our loss of our private, quiet enjoyment of our land?

Energy Resources

- The United States has a variety of energy resources and methods for disbursement. Is this project a benefit to the citizens of the United States or

only movement of energy into the United States or through the United States to South America from Canadian?

- Given the current economic picture of changing freight commodities, lower oil prices and drop in use of coal, existing rail ways are struggling to find new revenue sources. Would federal transportation dollars be better allocated to existing railways that have already made huge capital investments in trains, people and routes? Does this route take money out of the American economy and strengthen Canadian energy companies?

Socioeconomics

- During construction, there will be an influx of construction workers and increased demand for local services. We have experienced this with the building of wind mills and pipelines. These are short term workers that often travel with the jobs. They create more stress on our resources just by the volume of additional people that need housing, medical care and police and fire protection. What will the new demands be and how will they be funded?
- The uncertainty surrounding this project is causing farmer and landowners and homeowners to delaying decisions on capital expenditures. Farmers are not buying land or spending money on new equipment. Banks are hesitant to loan money if the farms are not going to be viable or they will be eliminated by the project. How can the social and economic impacts on our community be reduced in the short term by either quickly killing this project, or if the project is to proceed, provide assistance to those impacted through financial guarantees to farmers, landowners, homeowners and bankers that their decisions will be guaranteed by GLB Transportation?

Cultural and Historic Resources

- Does the route take into consideration nature and forest preserves that were designated as single use public property? Many people have donated land to the community in various ways with stipulation that it could only be used for public recreation. Has a full study been completed?
- Are public and private family cemeteries been taken into consideration?
- Has an archaeological sites plan been requested to show the potential impact of the new route? Has any Native American studies been made to ensure protection of archaeological sites? Who is responsible for the study? What are the plans if artifacts are found? What disruptions or delays would be caused in construction if relics are discovered during construction?

Aesthetics/Visual Resources

- The proposed development would eliminate the high visual quality of overlooking acres of farmland uninterrupted by commercialization. It would

also eliminate the high visual quality of the river due to the construction of the new bridge east of the existing vehicle bridge across the Kankakee River at Warner Bridge (MP 78.90).

- The commercial development will impact the scenery surrounding the Kankakee River, Rock Creek, Horse Creek, Terry Creek and numerous other creeks and watersheds used for recreation and quiet enjoyment of property. How can this be valued or offset?

Environmental Justice

- The GLBT project does not connect to existing rail ports in Joliet, Peoria, Gary, Whiting or Elkhart. This project, by design, would take traffic away from these ports which are located in low income areas. An analysis should be done to determine the impact on jobs in these low income areas?
- Farmers are large employers in this area. This project would reduce the amount of land that can be farmed and therefore reduce family income. Agriculture related jobs in support of farmers will also be eliminated. A new class of unemployed or under employed workers will be created. What is this impact and what will be done to assist families and workers disadvantaged by the project?

Cumulative Impacts

- Will this project replace or exceed current property taxes collected for the local community? An analysis of the impact needs to be performed to determine the net effect of this project on tax revenue for Fire Protection Districts, County Government, Sheriff Department, School Districts, Townships, Township Roads, Drainage Districts, Parks, Libraries, etc.... Rail lines will require additional services, particularly emergency services from first responders. How will these services be funded?
- Illinois has a “rolling stock exemption” where no sales tax is collected on repair parts or maintenance, those being the stated business of the rail port. Would any activity in the rail port contribute to local sales taxes to support locally provided services?
- This proposed project is not the only project impacting our agricultural acreage in recent years. We have had a pipeline project, a number of windmill projects, the recently revived Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area wants more than 21,000 acres taken out of agriculture. What is the cumulative effect of all these projects as it relates to our way of life and our ability to feed the country?

- What is the impact on land values based upon all factors listed above. How will landowners not paid by land acquisition be compensated for degradation in property values and for loss of quiet enjoyment of their property? One solution would be to provide all landowners within a certain distance of the rail line and/or facilities some form of compensation.
- Many statements made by GLBT regarding benefits to the local community are related to future development along the proposed route. Given the current financial condition and political climate in the State of Illinois, we do not feel that new businesses will come to our community just because there is a rail line. GLBT should be required to quantify the economic benefit to the area based upon specific businesses they foresee being developed in our area.
- Will the proposed project use monies from Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF)? If so, what guarantees will there be that the monies will be repaid or is this another venture that the taxpayers will be left footing the bill as the project is sold to another business for pennies on the dollar?
- What happens to the land if the project is not completed? Does it revert back to original landowners? When is this property considered abandoned if the project is not completed?
- How much farm ground is gone before we can no longer feed ourselves?
- Who represents us? Who protects us? Why is it of no consequence to run high speed trains with dangerous cargo through our communities just because our populations are lower?

In conclusion, we request the Surface Transportation Board give full review to the proposed GLBR project, and deny the project based upon the lack of public necessity and the negative impact on our environment.

Sincerely,

Larry L. Kirchner

Patricia G. Kirchner