



Public Comments from Kankakee County Farm Bureau regarding Docket No. FD 35952

July 14, 2016

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

The Kankakee County Farm Bureau appreciates the opportunity to submit this written comment to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) regarding the proposed Great Lakes Basin Rail (GLBR) project. Kankakee County Farm Bureau is a non-profit voluntary membership organization representing nearly 4,800 member families. Many of those families may be directly or indirectly impacted by this project. On behalf of the farmers, landowners, and members of the Kankakee County Farm Bureau we would like to relay the following questions and concerns we have regarding the proposed Great Lakes Basin Rail project.

In addition to the environmental review process, we request that the STB conduct a full review of the transportation merits of the GLBR project. GLBR is a newly formed entity that proposes to build a 280-mile toll railroad to bypass the congested Chicago Terminal to move freight more efficiently. The Kankakee County Farm Bureau questions the need for the proposed bypass given study and development of projects which address rail congestion in Chicago by the CREATE program and the lack of support from any Class 1 Railroad for the project.

As stated in the GLBR narrative, the proposed rail line enters Kankakee County at mile post 52.10 and exits Kankakee County just past mile post 93. The proposed rail line extends through Kankakee County for over 41 miles. At 200 feet wide, that would be nearly 1,000 acres of land, mostly farm land, consumed. This does not take into account the number of parcels affected by being severed, landlocked, or otherwise that become remnants unfeasible or uneconomical to be farmed. The narrative states a number of roads would be “stubbed” or closed in Kankakee County. This would alter the transportation infrastructure creating conditions of adverse travel impacting rural safety by affecting the service provided by first responders.

The GLBR narrative includes a 50-foot corridor for potential future use by utilities for electricity, water, natural gas, fiber optics and wireless coverage, which would be another source of revenue for GLBR. We request that STB exclude GLBR’s designated potential utility corridor from consideration under both the transportation merits and environmental impact review process. The potential utility corridor is not related to the operation of a freight railroad.

The narrative also includes a proposed Manteno “railport” to provide switching, repair and terminal services for potential customers, which appears to encompass 23 square miles of land. At approximately 640 acres per square mile section, that would be another 14,720 acres consumed displacing residents, relocating farmsteads, disrupting transportation infrastructure, altering drainage patterns, and removing farmland from production. While the proposed “railport” would remove 4.3% of Kankakee County’s farmland from production, GLBR fails to provide any support to demonstrate why it needs 14,720 acres for a “railport”. Based upon the information submitted by GLBR most of the land within the “railport” has no identified use for any purpose whatsoever.

Union Pacific, who publicly indicated they will not use the proposed GLBR railroad, operates the largest railport in the world, Bailey Yard, which covers 2,850 acres and is over eight miles in length. We are extremely concerned about GLBR's grossly excessive and unsubstantiated request for 14,720 acres of highly productive farmland for a "railport" five times the size of the largest railport in the world.

According to the most recent USDA ag census data available, there were 342,637 acres of land in farms in Kankakee County. If the rail project were to be constructed as outlined in the narrative, it would consume 15,720 acres of land which is equal to 4.58% of Kankakee County's farmland acreage. Agriculture in Kankakee County is nearly 17% of the County's economic output and roughly 1 in 12 jobs in Kankakee County relate to agriculture. If Kankakee County's agriculture industry is depleted by 4.58%, it would be detrimental to our local economy. The total annual output from Kankakee County agriculture is \$1,504,400,000. If you remove 4.58% from that, that is a loss of \$68,901,520 annually from our local economy. In Kankakee County, there are a total of 4,271 jobs in agriculture. If you remove 4.58% from that, our community would lose nearly 200 permanent jobs.

Along with the above statements is the concern that this rail line could potentially carry hazardous materials through our community. This could jeopardize the safety of nearby residents and pose a threat to our valuable natural resources including farm land, the Kankakee River (which this rail line proposes to cross through the Kankakee River State Park at mile point 79), and our wildlife.

The proposed GLB railroad is a high priority for the Kankakee County Farm Bureau. With the information available at this point, the Kankakee County Farm Bureau is opposed to GLBR project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Mussman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Keith Mussman, President
Kankakee County Farm Bureau