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Before the Surface Transportation Board
Washington, DC

Common Carrier Obligations of Railroads – Transportation of Hazardous Materials

Pursuant to the order of this Board dated June 4, 2008, as modified on June 19 and June 23, 2008, the Cameron Station Civic Association of Alexandria, VA hereby submits its written testimony to the Surface Transportation Board for the public hearing on July 22, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,

Ingrid Sanden
President, Cameron Station Civic Association

The Cameron Station Civic Association is an organization representing nearly 4,000 residents of Cameron Station in Alexandria, VA. Our board is an elected body and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the association. I regret that I am not able to present this testimony in person, but I thank you for the opportunity to file this testimony.

Cameron Station is located on the West End of Alexandria, within 400 feet of an ethanol transloading facility, which was built and is owned by Norfolk Southern. The operation is subcontracted to RSI Logistics, whose employees actually do the transloading work on the site. The site is surrounded by a chain-link fence, which my five-year-old could climb. There are often up to 50 tanker cars on the site, sitting for days on end. And the facility is located within 600 feet of Samuel Tucker elementary school, where 600 children will start school on July 28. The facility opened without public notice, knowledge, or input on April 9, 2008 and it has a very real impact on the residents here.

Recently, there have been accidents and acts of nature, which have caused Norfolk Southern train tanker cars, some of which contained ethanol, to derail, collide, or otherwise catch on fire. Specifically, communities in New Brighton, PA and Lafayette, LA, as well as Graniteville, SC, are just a few of many communities affected by railroad accidents and evacuations. Our neighborhood and school could be next.

Of course, railroads are needed and serve an important place in the commercial supply chain, however, unlike most businesses, railroads answer to no one – except this board.

Railroad accidents have wrecked havoc on communities like mine across the country. One major difference is that my neighborhood is much more densely populated than most of those communities. Our mayor has said that 18,000 residents live within a mile of this

facility Of course, accidents will always happen but isn't there some desire on the part of this body to avoid placing citizens and their children, businesses, and homes in such close proximity to such a facility should an accident, or man-made event, occur? As you know, ethanol is a highly flammable substance that is not water-soluble, making a fire at the facility very complicated to fight While it's true that many different kinds of substances have been rolling past our neighborhood for years, the issue here is location of the tankers on the rail lines, the fact that Norfolk Southern is apparently storing the tankers for long periods of time, and the transloading and transportation of the ethanol itself

This facility is not only located within close proximity to thousands of Alexandria residents, but it is also located within a stone's throw of the Van Dorn metro stop (Blue Line on Washington, D C 's metro system), the Virginia Railway Express line, the CSX railroad right-of-way, I-495, I-395 (which is I-95), and the intersection of Van Dorn Street and Eisenhower Avenue Should an incident occur at the facility, major transportation corridors in Washington, D C and the East Coast would be affected Not only rail transportation, but also truck traffic would come to a grinding halt for hours, perhaps days This is not an overstatement, just the truth

The facility is also located adjacent to Backlick Run, which flows to the Chesapeake Bay Should an accident occur, or should lightning strike one of the tankers – which happened in Kansas City, KS in June – the damage to the waterway would be devastating Placing the facility so close to such a waterway was risky, but since Norfolk Southern didn't need to consider environmental impacts when placing the facility, they clearly didn't care The U S water supply is already at risk for pollution from numerous environmental factors However, chemicals and biofuels transported by rail in large quantities have the ability to devastate marine life throughout an entire region from a single spill or derailment

Common sense would tell us that appropriate placement of these facilities and transport of ethanol should be a top priority for both rail companies and the federal government Obviously, there are accidents that can and have happened – somewhat frequently in Norfolk Southern's case But this facility also creates a very real terrorist target Norfolk Southern is not required to provide any security of any kind at this facility, which leaves numerous full, half full, or empty (but full of fumes) tank cars just sitting for days Most of my neighbors aren't rocket scientists or chemists, but even we know that this is a recipe for disaster Our priority is to protect our families, our homes, and our environment from potential disaster and to plan ahead for such a disaster Many of us lived here on September 11, 2001 and understand the need for appropriate emergency preparedness plans To this point, Norfolk Southern has essentially said that the steps they have taken to protect us have been "overkill " We don't agree

Norfolk Southern and other rail companies should be required to notify and consider nearby residents, schools, businesses and other entities when they begin planning such an operation The Alexandria facility has been open since April 9 and yet residents – and even the City Council – were not informed in advance According to our fire chief, our fire department was not equipped to fight an ethanol fire at the facility, nor were other fire departments in Northern Virginia

We understand that ethanol will play a huge role in our economy going forward. We ask the board to consider the impact that such facilities will have on communities. There are obvious alternative locations Norfolk Southern could have used – but they simply didn't want to do that because of their bottom line. That reasoning is unacceptable to those of us who live and work in such density and in such close proximity to this operation. The board should require a process by which affected individuals, property and business owners, as well as local governments, have an opportunity to be heard while such facilities are in the planning process. It's time for Norfolk Southern to take responsibility for placing children, residents, and property in danger, and for this board to balance the wants of the railroads with the needs of taxpaying Americans.