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January 8, 2008

Vicki Rutson
Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Dear Ms. Rutson:

I am writing to you today because the proposed sale of the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway Company (EJ&E) rail line to the Canadian National Railway – and the addition of at least 15 more freight trains to downtown Barrington – will significantly impact the quality of life of many of the people I represent in McHenry County, including longer commutes to work and possible threats to their health and safety. Furthermore, the delays could be worse than anticipated as Canadian National officials have refused to tell me if more trains in addition to the 15 could be added per day.

By law, the Surface Transportation Board in making its environmental impact study must consider many concerns, some of some of which are addressed in this letter: viable route alternatives; the shifting of a problem from one area to another; the impact on regional or local transportation systems and patterns; the consistency with community land plans; impact of the air quality and noise; and safety standards including vehicle delay time at railroad grade crossings.

Although the EJ&E line does not run directly through the 16th District of Illinois, the tracks are located within 2 ½ miles of it and tens of thousands of the people I represent in McHenry County travel along Route 14, Route 59, and/or Lake-Cook Road in Barrington, Illinois each day. Another 4,000 or so McHenry County residents ride Metra rail to work each day, crossing the EJ&E line “at grade” in Barrington. All of these people would be detrimentally impacted by additional freight trains in some way.

At the least, they would be delayed getting to and from work each day because of the extra trains. If each train takes six minutes to traverse a crossing, that’s an extra hour and a half of delay each day for motorists passing through Barrington. McHenry County motorists already deal with a significant amount of traffic congestion on their daily commutes to work. A large majority of McHenry County residents are married with children, and any further delays to their commute would make it even more difficult for them to attend to the needs of their families.

The U.S. Department of Transportation developed engineering standards for grading traffic streams at a Level of Service (LOS) based on the time it takes for vehicles to travel. The grades are A through F. Local engineers have already determined the crossings in Barrington are rated “F!” And now the people of this area are being asked to stomach even more congestion. Can it get any worse

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than an “F?” The answer is yes, because an already heavily congested area could become Gridlock City.

And worse, it could become a matter of life and death. The three EJ&E rail crossings at Lake-Cook Road, Route 59, and Route 14 are a total of about 1 mile apart. Some freight trains are up to two miles long. What happens if someone gets in an accident or has a medical emergency when a long freight train is passing through Barrington? If they are east of the train, all three of those major arterial intersections could be blocked at the same time for several minutes and the emergency vehicle would have to go several miles out of the way to get to Good Shepherd Hospital in Lake Barrington. Every second counts when it comes to saving lives, and the delays caused by the additional freight traffic could be catastrophic.

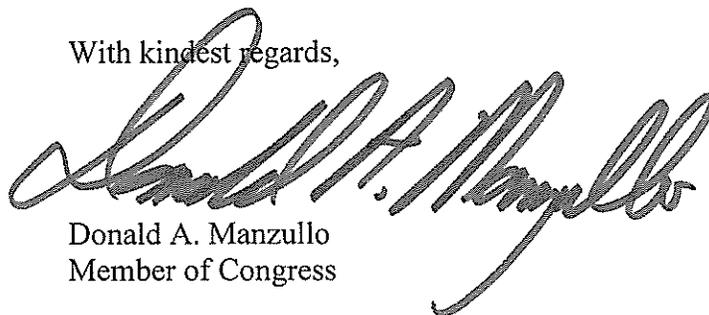
I am also extremely concerned about the safety of our people at the grade crossings themselves. The Barrington school district estimates its school buses cross the EJ&E lines 400 times a day. The addition of 15 freight trains a day will quadruple the safety risk of students who have to traverse the crossings to get to school each day. Officials in many states – including Illinois – are so concerned about the safety of at-grade rail crossings that they will only allow a community to add an at-grade crossing if they eliminate one elsewhere.

Finally, I am very concerned that Canadian National’s purchase of the EJ&E line could doom a planned massive expansion of commuter rail that will help more than a million suburban residents get to work faster as road congestion continues to snarl suburban roads. The 55-mile STAR line, part of Metra’s future expansion, would connect nearly 100 suburban communities by linking together four of Metra’s lines, including the Union Pacific Northwest line that McHenry County uses, and provide a direct Metra connection to O’Hare International Airport.

The problem is Metra was planning to run the STAR line along the existing EJ&E tracks that Canadian National proposes to purchase. Without access to the EJ&E tracks, I fear the STAR line – that will be so important to our transportation infrastructure in the future – will be shelved indefinitely, which will mean much longer commutes for the people of northern Illinois.

While I understand the need to ease freight congestion in the Chicago-land area, the Surface Transportation Board should not approve a transaction that simply transfers the problems from downtown Chicago to suburban areas just to save a couple of dollars. I encourage you to consider solutions that increase safety, reduce pollution, and reduce congestion for all Illinois residents rather than “solutions” that pit one community against the other.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald A. Manzullo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D".

Donald A. Manzullo
Member of Congress