

EJ&E viewpoint

At this time, I am in reserved opposition of the proposed EJ&E purchase by the Canadian National Railroad. First of all, I don't think that CN has been very neighborly in their approach to the communities and groups who are opposed to the purchase. That point, in and of itself, is not a non-starter for meaningful debate of the issue. The tone and public posture that one sets for such a major intrusion in the life of many communities is an important first impression however. It would definitely provide insight on the kind of relations that would exist with CN in the future. I don't believe CN ever really listened to the critical mass of south suburban residents, regional councils of government or municipalities in the South Suburbs.

More importantly, there has been little discussion from CN about any efforts on their part to mitigate congestion caused by more and longer trains in the affected communities. This is the main reason that I am in opposition to this purchase in its present form. "In its present form" means that my reservations could be removed if CN would listen to community concerns in their planning process. One of my main arguments centers around lack of access to retail centers and related travel inconveniences to our residents. There could be major traffic bottlenecks on both Western and Cicero Avenues with the advent of longer and more frequent trains. This would severely hamper retail access in the Villages of Park Forest and Matteson. Our region has been historically left behind when it comes to creating or improving access. This has been irrespective of mode; airport access, commercial rail extension or the long overdue I57/I294 interchange in the south metropolitan region.

As an urban planner, I generally subscribe to the principle of "moving more freight" as an important variable in economic development. There has to be more tangible evidence that moving more freight in this instance has a measurable economic impact on our region. It is all very theoretical at this time. Many people perceive this acquisition as merely a business deal. Analogous to "trickle-down economics", it was a theory of economic public policy that dictated that people had to have faith in it and wait. Like Godot, the benefits never came. The stakes are too high for our communities, struggling to develop to our fullest potential, to have faith and wait. Nor should we be told tacitly, "let them eat cake" told. We will not stand in the way of progress and economic development for our communities. Until we can be shown tangible benefits, our communities must be strident in their efforts to ensure that our quality of life is not diminished by this "business deal".