

The EJ&E Decision

On December 24, the Surface Transportation Board (in a unanimous decision), approved the \$300 million sale of the EJ&E Railroad to the Canadian National Railway. This plan will substantially increase the amount of traffic on the EJ&E which cuts through south suburban areas such as Frankfort, Matteson, Park Forest and Chicago Heights. The town of Chicago Heights, Frankfort and Mokena signed agreements with CN for traffic mitigation relief in exchange for support. This relief was not tendered to the great majority of our region such as Park Forest with its major access routes or the retail hub of the Village of Matteson.

CN board chairman Charles D. Nottingham made a statement; "I am pleased that the board agreed, in a bipartisan and unanimous manner, after an unprecedented public involvement process, to grant the relief that this merger will provide to the many Chicago neighborhoods that have been disproportionately burdened for many decades with severe rail traffic-related roadway congestion". With all due respect, I think that the statement is Orwellian double speak. The acquisition will increase train traffic throughout these towns, plain and simple. The lack of full understanding and cooperation by CN has caused a "have and have not" situation with some of our towns. The agreements made by some of our towns should not necessarily be viewed as capitulation. However, the strong advocacy by other municipalities should not be viewed as intransigence. I am proud of all of the advocates; individual, organizations and units of government who presented a united front against "policy by fiat". There were concessions won, such as a five year monitoring of traffic congestion by the STB. We'll be watching.

Here is an excerpt of my testimony to the federal government in public hearing held on September 25th of 2008.

EJ&E speech submitted by State Representative Al Riley:
09/25/08

.....The 38th District includes all or portions of Country Club Hills, Flossmoor, Harvey, Hazel Crest, Homewood, Markham, Matteson, Oak Forest, Olympia Fields, Park Forest, Richton Park and Tinley Park.

I am here in opposition of the proposed EJ&E purchase. I don't think that CN has been neighborly in their whole approach and that is why I am against this purchase in its present form. There has been little discussion from CN to mitigate congestion begin caused by more and longer trains. This is about mitigating congestion around the Chicago area. We are being viewed as the hinterland in the deal. I don't believe CN ever really listened to the critical mass of south suburban residents, the Councils of Governments and municipalities in the metropolitan area.

The whole issue of congestion and mitigation and the perspective of these long trains and its impact on our region have not been fully addressed at this time. If CN believes this is a good deal for the Chicago area, than additional discussions need to be had between CN and the municipalities.

My main argument is the lack of access and inconvenience to our residents. There is currently a bottleneck on Western Avenue, and Main Street between the Village of

Matteson, and the Village of Park Forest to name a few. Our region has been historically left behind when it comes to creating access, whether it be airports, commercial rail and long overdue interchanges in the south metropolitan region.

There has to be some kind of tangible evidence that 'moving more freight' in this instance has some kind of economic impact on our region. It is all theoretical at this time; sort of an abstract concept. Most people perceive this is a business deal, an acquisition. Conceptionally, I am for "moving more freight"; but we have to evaluate this precept of 'yes it is good, trust me' and show us something tangible.

It is like trickledown economics. It was a theory that affected public policy and people had to have faith in it and wait. And it never happened. When there is a cause and effect that has yet to be tested, municipalities must be strident in their efforts to ensure their quality of life is not diminished in this business deal.

Ladies and gentlemen, there appears to be some fallacies in their argument for this business deal.

Respectfully submitted,

State Representative Al Riley