

Before The  
**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD**

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Finance Docket No. 35087  
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**Canadian National Railway Company and Grand Trunk Corporation-Control-EJ&E West  
Company**  
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Comments of the National Association of Railroad Passengers

*Summary of party's concerns regarding the transaction—*

The Canadian National Railroad (CN) proposes to abandon the St. Charles Air Line in conjunction with its acquisition of the Elgin, Joliet, and Eastern Railroad. The Air Line is vital to Amtrak operations and will remain so until a connection is built at "Grand Crossing" which enables trains approaching Chicago from Champaign, Carbondale, Memphis, New Orleans, and intermediate points, to leave the Canadian National mainline and use the Norfolk Southern line already used by Amtrak's Chicago-Michigan corridor services and most Chicago-East Coast Amtrak trains.

While the Grand Crossing connection would permit an improvement in Amtrak service, any other conceivable alternate route to the Air Line would seriously worsen the service, adding potentially as much as an hour to trip times. Therefore, NARP strongly urges that—if the CN proposal is approved—such approval be conditioned on CN permitting Amtrak to continue using the existing line at no additional expense until the Grand Crossing connection is built and ready for service.

If CN's proposal is approved without this condition, the result likely would be the end of passenger rail service between Chicago, Champaign, Carbondale, Memphis and New Orleans, destroying both an effective, state-supported corridor service within Illinois as well as a vital national system route serving multiple states.

*Background—*

Passenger rail service has been provided over the current Canadian National Chicago-New Orleans mainline since Amtrak's start-up on May 1, 1971, and prior to that by the Illinois Central Railroad and other carriers. Prior to inception of Amtrak and for the first ten months of Amtrak's existence, most passenger trains utilizing the Illinois Central mainline served Chicago's Central Station. On March 5, 1972, Amtrak consolidated all of its Chicago operations at Union Station. Trains utilizing the Illinois Central mainline were accommodated on the St. Charles Air Line, an elevated rail line that connected the Illinois Central to the Burlington Railroad mainline at a point approximately 1 ½ mile south and west of Union Station.

By nature of its grade-separated right of way (save for one at-grade railroad crossing with the Rock Island Railroad, now Metra, passenger mainline at 16<sup>th</sup> Street), the St. Charles Air Line was and continues to be the only viable, intact (not abandoned) routing for passenger trains to reach Union Station from the Canadian National mainline. Other alternative routes, including

the EJ&E mainline, are far more circuitous and also involve many at-grade crossings with other freight railroads.

Passenger rail service on the CN mainline at present consists of two State of Illinois-supported corridor trains operating between Chicago Union Station and Carbondale, IL and Amtrak's *City of New Orleans* operating between Chicago Union Station and New Orleans, LA.

*Growing ridership—*

The Chicago-Carbondale service has thrived since introduction of a second corridor frequency by the State of Illinois in October 2006. The traveling public responded immediately. Ridership in November 2006 versus November 2005 was up 61.23%. Fiscal year numbers are even stronger: Fiscal 2007 ridership was up 67.37% over Fiscal 2006. The *City of New Orleans*' ridership is also up. This strong increase in ridership would be in severe jeopardy if the St. Charles Air Line would be abandoned without consideration of an alternative route. Fortunately, there is such a solution.

*Grand Crossing, the key to preservation of passenger rail service—*

There is another potential route for passenger trains from the Canadian National mainline to Union Station. An abandoned right of way exists near 75th St. and South Chicago Ave. in Chicago that connects the Canadian National mainline to the Norfolk Southern Chicago-Cleveland mainline. This so-called "Grand Crossing Connection" was used prior to Amtrak, mainly to bring Nickel Plate Road passenger trains operating to and from Buffalo into Chicago's LaSalle Street Station. The right of way is preserved and intact.

If the connection is rebuilt and infrastructure improvements made on Norfolk Southern's mainline, this would be not only an acceptable alternative to the St. Charles Air Line, but in fact an improvement in passenger rail service to Southern Illinois, with trip times reduced by at least 10 minutes.

*Conclusion—*

NARP strongly opposes abandonment of the St. Charles Air Line without proper accommodation for passenger rail service. If the acquisition is to be approved, it should be conditioned on passenger rail service on the Canadian National mainline having convenient, reliable access to Chicago Union Station—either by continued use of the St. Charles Air Line or construction of a connection at Grand Crossing.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.



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Surface Transportation Board  
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**HDR**

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Certificate of Service

I hereby certify I have served a copy of my Comments regarding the above-referenced proceedings, on behalf of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, dated January 25, 2008, upon all parties of record designated on the service list late release January 25, 2008, in accordance with the indicated sentence in the second paragraph of Decision No. 3, by first class mail postage-prepaid.



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