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September 11, 2014

Chairman Daniel R. Elliott III
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington DC 20423

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Dear Chairman Elliott:

I am writing in support of the Village of Barrington and the City of Aurora's recently filed petition calling for the extension of the Surface Transportation Board's (STB) oversight period for the Canadian National (CN) Railroad until January 23, 2017. This request comes as a follow up to your visit to Illinois where we discussed rail safety issues and problems with rail traffic among communities along the EJ&E corridor.

As you know, the STB placed CN under an unprecedented six year monitoring period after CN completed the controversial purchase of the EJ&E. The monitoring period was put in place to ensure CN fully complies with the promises it made when CN acquired the EJ&E.

Since the acquisition, several suburban communities in Illinois have contacted the STB with their concerns about increased rail traffic and blocked rail crossings along the EJ&E. The Village of Barrington and City of Aurora in particular have been vigilant in promoting increased rail safety, especially for trains carrying crude oil and ethanol. These large unit trains, and other freight trains, are blocking crossings and increasing delays throughout the EJ&E corridor. In fact, despite CN's claims that track upgrades would decrease the number and duration of blocked crossings, there have been 5,267 instances of crossings being blocked by trains for ten minutes or more in the first quarter of 2014 – the highest number since CN took ownership of the rail lines.

The increase in the duration of blocked crossings by rail traffic is of particular concern in a year when farmers in Illinois and across the Midwest are expecting a record harvest. The most recent USDA crop report forecasts record soybean and corn crops along with very strong production in other commodities this year. The record harvest will only exacerbate the already high volume of freight traffic for these communities and could create more instances of crossings being blocked for long durations.

In light of the concerns expressed by these communities and the expectation of increased freight traffic this year, I believe it is important that the STB extend its oversight period to ensure CN is operating safely and honoring its commitments to protect the quality of life for families living along the EJ&E. An oversight extension would continue to encourage CN to adhere to its commitments made to the STB and would allow for a more thorough analysis of the impacts of rail traffic on affected communities after CN's acquisition of the EJ&E.

Safe and efficient rail service is vital to the Illinois economy, and traffic problems caused by blocked rail crossings can be disastrous to the livelihood of impacted communities. The STB can help these communities by continuing to practice rigorous oversight of railroads who fail to meet their legal requirements or keep their commitments made before the STB. Extending its oversight period until January 2017 will help to ensure CN meets its requirements.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator

Cc: Vice Chairwoman Ann Begeman; Board Member Debra Miller