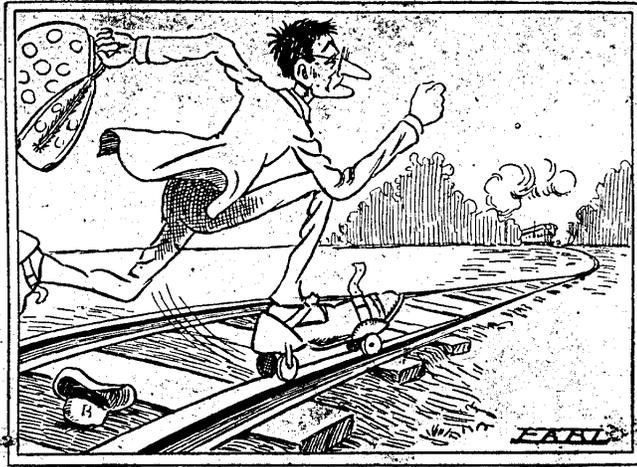


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8/13/04



THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO GO.

To The -

Surface Transportation Board,  
On behalf of my people in the  
name of Economic Development.  
Please don't abandon the  
Tracks from Saubville to  
Kiel

Thank you -

Rose Hoyer Leider, Dist. 2  
Ozaukee County Supervisor

For a number of reasons, including a lack of interest by the current owner, the Saukville to Kiel portion of the Milwaukee to Hilbert line no longer carries a lot of freight. The Canadian National Railway would just as soon abandon its requirement to serve these customers. The Canadian National purchased the old Wisconsin Central tracks for other reasons -- they never cared about this line anyway.

To local citizens -- and to Wisconsin in general -- the rail right-of-way from Milwaukee to Hilbert is priceless. It means jobs and paychecks. Trying to create a new right-of-way today and obtain land for such a route would cost a tremendous amount -- and it may not be possible legally.

We don't know where fuel prices will be in a year or 10 years down the road. Getting rid of this railroad line at this point would make no sense. Sure, it needs a heavier gauge track to carry the rail cars of today. It needs new railroad ties. Based on a long-term profit outlook and the slightest bit of marketing those costs can work into a business plan. There is a short-run railroad in Wisconsin that has expressed an interest in the Milwaukee to Hilbert route -- and there is a state government program that can help preserve this line. There is a consortium of county governments doing the same kind of work in other parts of the state.

Let's not throw away a valuable asset that was begun by our ancestors in the 1870's. We encourage the government bodies on the federal and state levels to keep this line in service so the current customers are not jeopardized in their freight needs. If the Canadian National no longer wants to run the line, then force them to sell it to somebody who will run it -- the whole line, Milwaukee to Hilbert. That's the way it was built, and it will turn a profit if kept together.

The federal Surface Transportation Board is required to give priority to efforts to continue freight rail service over the line. Just the potential business from farm cooperatives and farmers themselves should provide enough proof that this line can be profitable. And it will if we get an operator who wants to make it work. Please, save our rail service.

## The Editor's View

By Gary J. Felder



## All We Want Is Railroad Service

It's difficult to imagine the anticipation and excitement of local residents back in 1870-71 as they awaited the Milwaukee & Northern Railroad Co.'s work, building a railroad from the north side of Milwaukee to the Hilbert/Greenleaf area near Green Bay.

The railroad had chosen a route that bypassed the growing communities of the day (places like Waubesa, Silver Creek and Hingham) for a new route that would spur the growth of Saukville, Fredonia, Random Lake, Adell, Waldo and other places. Plymouth became "The Hub City" because it hosted east-west and north-south railroads.

It was railroad official Guido Pfister who filed the first plat of what is now the Village of Random Lake. Fellow railroad official Heliodore Hilbert filed the First Addition to the original plat. By the way, the community names of Waldo, Hilbert, Greenleaf and Rhinelander all come from railroad executives from those early days.

The Milwaukee to Hilbert route has served these people and communities well. There was passenger service well into the 1950's. There was a profitable freight service with trains running in both directions several times a day.

It's true that trucking became more and more important in the latter part of the last century, but there still are certain freight categories that are easily and most economically hauled by rail. Unfortunately, our rail line has been involved in a number of sales and mergers. It has received tender loving care for a while.

## Don't give up the train

Communities need the Saukville-Kiel rail line; the state and counties should be ready to save it if abandonment is approved

The Canadian National Railway says it does not have enough customers to justify the cost of maintaining the railroad tracks between Saukville and Kiel and has asked for federal approval to abandon the line.

It may be in the railroad's interest to do that, but certainly it is in no one else's—not the farmers and businesses that depend on the railroad, not the communities served by the line, not the public.

Everyone except the railroad company loses if rail service ends, especially the communities of Saukville, Fredonia, Random Lake, Adell and others along the 37-mile route, whose economic development efforts would be dealt a blow by being unable to offer industries railroad access.

The cost to the public of abandoning even this very small link in the Wisconsin railroad system should not be underestimated. It would represent a move backward from a mode of freight transport that is both cost efficient and environmentally friendly. It would put more trucks on the roads, including the small county highways serving rural communities, at a cost that would be measured in safety, convenience, air pollution and road maintenance expenses charged to taxpayers.

Abandonment is the right word for what Canadian National proposes. The company says it would pull up the tracks and give the

right of way to the state to be used as a bike trail or for some other recreational purpose.

The route would never be used by trains again.

That can't be allowed to happen.

The federal Surface Transportation Board shouldn't let it happen. It should look to the needs of the communities that stand to lose rail service, deny Canadian National's petition and urge the company to work harder to market its services to potential customers along the Saukville-Kiel line to justify track upgrades.

The railroad is predicting, however, that the federal agency will grant its request. In that event, state and county officials should be ready to step in and save the rail service with means made possible by the state's Freight Railroad Preservation Program.

Under the program, the state could buy the rail line and lease it to another railroad operator, with 80% of the funds coming from the state and the remainder from a railroad consortium comprised of county governments.

Such a consortium already exists—the Eastern Wisconsin Railroad Consortium—and the pieces seem to be falling into place to put the rail line preservation plan into action if necessary.

The Wisconsin and Southern Railroad Co. is eager to lease the line with a promise of improved service. Some members of the Ozaukee County Board have expressed support

for having the county join the consortium at a cost of about \$15,000 a year. The Saukville and Fredonia Village Boards have passed resolutions urging the County Board to take that step. Sen. Mary Panzer of West Bend and Rep. Daniel LeMahieu of Oostburg have spoken in favor of state and local action to save the rail line.

This, added to the strong public support for continuing the rail service expressed at hearings (and likely to be expressed again at a hearing in Random Lake Friday), suggests that, in the long run, it might be better for the area if Canadian National is allowed to bail out and the rail line put in the hands of a motivated operator under the scrutiny of state and local governments with a vested interest in its success.

Canadian National has treated the Saukville-Kiel line like an unwanted orphan. Speaker after speaker at hearings on the proposed abandonment said the reason the line handles only 200 carloads of freight a year is that its operator has done so little to improve and market its services.

If that operator gets permission to abandon the line, the state, with help from Ozaukee, Sheboygan and Manitowoc Counties and a better-run railroad, should take the opportunity to show that this is the little rail line that could.