



## Testimony to the Illinois House Railroad Safety Committee

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**Introduction.** Thank you, Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am Randy Blankenhorn, Executive Director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, an agency created by the General Assembly over two years ago to address transportation, land use and other comprehensive planning issues from a regional perspective. The General Assembly last year amended our enabling legislation directing the Agency to develop a process for analyzing "Developments of Regional Importance" or DRI's. Although this process has not yet been fully implemented, we are using the acquisition of the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway by the Canadian National to define the parameters of how CMAP should address issues that have regional impacts. Our job is to analyze for our local, regional and state decision makers the impacts, both positive and negative, of development and infrastructure proposals. Ultimately the goal of the DRI process is to create developments and promote investments that add real and lasting value to our communities.

**The need for a regional voice.** Regarding freight, Metropolitan Chicago has traditionally not had a champion to look out for the public interest. National discussions and decisions about the movement of goods are dominated by port cities and states, partly because our region has not had a strong voice despite being the nation's hub of truck and rail freight. The Chicago region has a tremendous amount at stake and -- like the proposed EJ&E acquisition -- the movement of freight can have a wide range of potentially positive or negative effects, including economic ones. Freight bottlenecks make it harder for commuters in cars and trains to reach their destinations and harder for companies to get their goods into and out of our region. But if we get it right, freight traffic can serve as a major engine of economic prosperity.

CMAP was created by state law two years ago precisely to fill that leadership function on such regional matters. In particular, freight and goods movement are a regional issue more than a State issue, and this issue is broader and more complex than a simple accumulation of the 283 municipal and seven county governments' individual interests. CMAP exists to take the lead on regional issues like freight, and we plan to be in the middle of this discussion, because the region needs a voice to express the larger public interest.

**The STB process.** Regarding the proposed acquisition of the EJ&E by CN, our main purpose is to ensure that the STB's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process meets the needs of our region, which includes the seven counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will -- five of which are intersected by the EJ&E line, and all of which will be affected by the proposed acquisition.

We simply do not have enough information yet to determine whether this acquisition is in the region's best interests. CMAP is ready to provide the STB with any information necessary to help them make the best decision for our residents. That includes the official population, employment, and transportation projections that our agency prepares on behalf of the region. In turn, we are counting on the full cooperation of the CN and STB regarding timely sharing of the latest details about this proposal. If we have the appropriate information in a timely manner, CMAP will not only be able to provide analysis from the regional perspective, but also assist local communities in determining the benefits and issues to be mitigated from their local point of view. I am confident that all parties will commit to an open flow of information so that we will be able to forge an outcome that will be in the best interests of our region, our communities, and our residents.

**Important factors to study.** Careful, long-term planning -- exactly what CMAP is charged to do for northeastern Illinois -- is the way to achieve these results. Collectively, we need to provide local officials and concerned parties with the best available information so they can make informed choices in responding to the EJ&E acquisition. Our letter this week to the STB pointed out that CMAP already fills that clearinghouse function. So during the EIS process, it is imperative that the STB and CN use our region's existing information-sharing mechanisms to ensure an outcome that is not contrary to the public interest.

- **Time horizon.** In our opinion, it is impossible to properly analyze the impacts of this acquisition if we are only looking three to five years beyond the date of STB approval. While we understand the dynamic nature of rail activity, this time frame does not allow us to evaluate impacts that will likely emerge over time. The time horizon that the STB considers needs to be extended to at least 10 years after the board acts.
- **The overall transportation system.** It is commonly believed that the nation and metropolitan Chicago will see a significant increase in freight traffic over the next twenty years. CMAP's review must carefully balance anticipated transportation benefits along with impacts at the community level. Interactions between the region's freight, passenger rail, and

highway systems are a major concern that impacts our quality of life and economic prosperity.

- **CREATE and Amtrak.** CREATE is a regional project to improve freight traffic into and through metropolitan Chicago. There is a significant commitment to the CREATE project and we need to better understand how the EJ&E acquisition meshes with CREATE's planned improvements. We must also ensure that Amtrak service that many people -- especially from downstate -- rely upon to reach Chicago remains viable. A significant financial commitment has been made to enhanced Amtrak service, and that must be protected.
- **STAR line, SouthEast Service and other mass transit impacts.** We need to understand how two new commuter projects identified in the region's adopted 2030 Regional Transportation Plan may be impacted by this proposal. About 36 miles of Metra's planned STAR line would rely on the EJ&E corridor from Hoffman Estates to Joliet. And Metra's planned SouthEast Service would provide passenger rail between downtown Chicago and the south suburbs, intersecting the EJ&E in Chicago Heights. Additionally, there may be opportunities to enhance transit service on existing rail lines.
- **Mitigation commitments.** Our agency is eager to see CN's detailed commitments to mitigate anticipated negative impacts, and we believe that the STB's ruling should stipulate that those commitments are binding across at least the 10-year horizon that CMAP proposes. CN's mitigation commitments should address real concerns about safety, noise, vibration, and traffic congestion, along with the quality of air, water, and other natural resources.
- **Safety.** Safety analysis should include the potential for increased risk of grade-crossing collisions, whether vehicular, bicycle, or pedestrian; more blockages of roadway crossings that serve as essential links in emergency response by police, fire, and medical personnel; and an increased risk of derailment and hazardous material spills.

**Conclusion.** In summary, CMAP is prepared to fulfill its responsibility and provide decision makers -- here and in Washington -- with the best available data and analysis. We look forward to partnering closely with CN and the STB in that effort.