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Officials discuss transportation improvements

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March 30, 2010

By **TONY A. SOLANO** tsolano@pioneerlocal.com

Barrington hosted U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean, D-8th, and representatives of regional transportation agencies Monday to discuss infrastructure improvements to the area.

Among the topics discussed was Barrington's ongoing battle for grade crossing separations on the Elgin, Eastern & Joliet Railroad to mitigate the effects of Canadian National Railway Co. adding more freight train traffic to the line.

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U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, and U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean, D-8th, answer questions about local transportation issues during a press conference, at the Barrington Village Hall Monday.

(Ruthie Hauge/Staff Photographer)

Bean arranged for LaHood's meeting with officials to be held in her hometown of Barrington.

"We had not been able to interact with him directly while he was in (Washington) D.C., so I was happy Congresswoman Bean was able to set this up," said Barrington Village President Karen Darch.

Darch said LaHood suggested funding for a grade separation for one of the three state routes that intersect with the EJ&E Railroad in downtown Barrington could come from the \$600 million remaining in the federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants program.

"We're looking at TIGER or any other funds they can give us," Darch said.

The EJ&E line intersects at grade with the Metra Union Pacific Northwest line and eight major roads in the Barrington area, including Lake-Cook Road, Route 59 and Route 14 in downtown Barrington.

"(Without mitigation) Barrington would be the only area that doesn't have at least one state route with grade separation from the EJ&E," Darch said.

A grade separation project at Route 14 and the EJ&E Railroad is projected to cost \$69 million, according to a document from The Regional Answer to Canadian National (TRAC) coalition, which Darch co-chairs. Grade separation at Route 59 and the EJ&E tracks is projected to cost \$84 million and at Lake-Cook Road it is projected to cost \$74 million, according to the document from the 13-municipality coalition.

Barrington and other coalition communities are appealing the U.S. Surface Transportation Board's decision to approve CN's purchase of the EJ&E line. The coalition is also asking for Congress to oversee those supervising CN's compliance. LaHood does not have any influence in the appeal.

Darch said Barrington, CN and other villages and groups involved in the appeal will submit briefs and responses to the U.S. Circuit Court of



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Appeals in Washington D.C. through July. She said she expects oral arguments to begin this fall.

Darch is hopeful the transportation board's approval of the purchase will be overturned or CN will be made to provide more funding to mitigate the negative effects of the increased freight traffic on the EJ&E.

Prior to LaHood's tour of the EJ&E Railroad in Barrington, he discussed regional infrastructure projects such as the Route 120 bypass and the Route 53 extension with representatives from the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Lake County Board, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Lake and McHenry county divisions of transportation and others.

The transportation officials made pitches for their projects to be included on the next federal transportation bill, which would provide a multiyear outline for transportation projects. The previous transportation authorization bill expired in 2009 and a new one has yet to be discussed.

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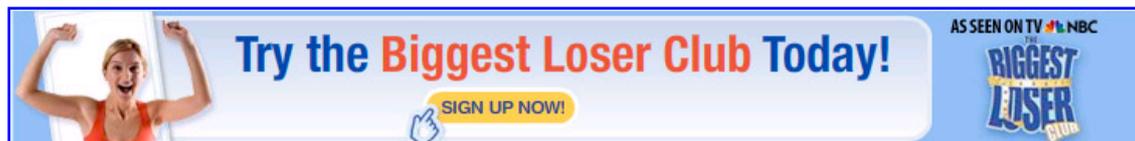
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