

Editorial: Let's move on from GLBT rail proposal



A sign was posted along US Rt. 14 opposing a proposed railroad that would run through south Lake and Porter counties. (John Konstantaras / Post-Tribune)

By **Post-Tribune Editorial Board**
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OK, enough already. Uncle.

There, we said it. Now, can we please forget about the proposed Great Lakes Basin Transportation railroad project and start spending time on more important, more desirable proposals? Maybe, say, like finding a way to clean up local politics and keep roaming fingers out of the taxpayers' cookie jar? That's obviously a different discussion.

The latest GLBT proposal calls for a privately funded, \$8 billion, 260-mile freight line from Milton, Wis., through Illinois and into LaPorte County. It has a valid goal — to unsnarl some of the freight rail congestion through Chicago, which is a vital hub in our national rail system.

But since its inception, the proposed GLBT freight rail line has met opposition from the people, including many farmers whose property it would slice through. Under the proposal, as many as 85 trains, which could travel at speeds reaching 70 mph, would traverse the rail line daily.

That's a lot of train traffic. And fast, too.

Local officials in Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties have expressed their concerns about the proposal. Porter County Commissioner Laura Blaney noted her opposition to the plan in September, citing the "negative impact this proposal has on Porter County's schools, fire and police departments, farmers and residents."

She's not alone. Officials in other communities along the route share her opposition.

In Illinois, the Ogle County Board last month approved a resolution urging the Surface Transportation Board to pursue the no-build option when it comes to the GLBT proposal, according to the Ogle County Life. Davis Junction Trustee William Luchsinger, the newspaper reported, said the proposed rail line would be "detrimental to our entire village."

There are more.

Heck, even Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern, two of the railroads that have the freight trains to use the new tracks, say they won't. The other four railroads are so far uncommitted.

Maybe we're just not visionary in our thinking. Maybe we can't see the greater good. Or, maybe, we hear what opponents along the proposed route say.

We understand that freight rail congestion through Chicago is a problem, but there are other options to increase efficiency that don't create a new problem for folks along the proposed rail line. The CREATE program, which is a public-private partnership between railroads and federal and state agencies, is an option already in place.

A February 2015 report from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning said that "CREATE projects completed to date have already made a significant impact on the performance of the transportation system."

More work is needed, but that's a good start.

Meanwhile, the Surface Transportation Board's Office of Environmental Analysis has postponed an environmental review, at GLBT's request, until a formal application for the rail line is submitted. There's a Feb. 28 deadline looming for a GLBT status update.

We don't need to wait that long.

The plan would split too many farms, run too close to too many homes and could pose an additional safety hazard to the communities it would run through, we believe.

It's time to move on.

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