

Boone County Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Commission

May 27, 2016

Mr. Dave Navecky
Office of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
Docket No. FD 35952
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Re: Docket No. FD 35952 - Comments concerning the scope and content of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) relative to the Great Lakes Basin Transportation Corporation's proposed new railroad.

Dear Mr. Dave Navecky:

The Boone County Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Commission is writing to convey its concerns about the Great Lakes Basin Transportation Corporation's (GLBTC) railroad proposal. Created by the full Boone County Board in 2006, it has been this Commission's primary objective to facilitate the preservation of farmland in a community that repeatedly determined, via the process of developing and updating a Boone County Comprehensive Plan, that preserving farmland and the rural character of this county was a top priority.

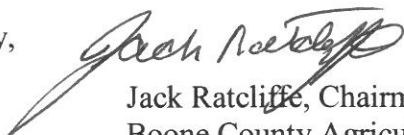
The proposed railroad raises many serious concerns relative to the natural resources that occur in Boone County, Illinois. The soil, water, plants and animals establish the foundation of these important natural resources. Collectively these natural resources form the ecological and environmental basis upon which the strength of our agricultural history, and current agricultural industry has been cultivated. The rich soils and plentiful water resources and ideal climate of Boone County enables a powerful, agriculturally based, economic engine that annually exceeds five hundred eighty-six million dollars.

Our Commission is concerned that the proposed railroad will degrade the quality of our surface waters, threaten our aquifers, interfere with drainage systems (such as agricultural drainage tile), degrade and/or destroy wetlands, and remove and/or ruin the productivity of prime agricultural soils – not only from the footprint of the railway and the earthworks on lands used to construct the railway, but also in the fact that the developer is offering business connections to any landowner adjacent to this proposed railroad right-of-way. This last issue having the perpetual effect of undermining any community planning that has been done in Boone County since 1978. In an agribusiness community this isn't considered progressive, it is considered regressive.

This Commission reflects on the host of comments and concerns that have been or will be submitted by local organizations and agencies. Specifically, we reference those comments and concerns detailed in letters submitted by the Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau, the Boone County Conservation District, the Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Natural Land Institute, and the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District. It is our respectful request that the result of your scoping process result in requiring a complete, thorough and rigorous environmental review of the entire route proposed by the GLBTC.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing this letter and the documents incorporated by reference.

Sincerely,



Jack Ratcliffe, Chairman
Boone County Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Commission
1212 Logan Avenue, Suite 102
Belvidere, Illinois 61008