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CHICAGO METROPOLIS 2020 SAYS RAILROAD PLAN COULD EASE RAIL AND HIGHWAY CONGESTION AND BENEFIT ECONOMY

CHICAGO—Canadian National Railway’s proposal to purchase and expand the use of the EJ&E Railway Company on the western portion of the region has the potential to ease freight congestion that frustrates commuters and endangers the region’s economy, according to Chicago Metropolis 2020.

Chicago Metropolis 2020, a business-based civic organization, on Monday delivered a “statement of support with conditions” to the Surface Transportation Board (STB), the federal regulatory agency with jurisdiction over railroad mergers and sales.

“The Chicago area freight network is choking on congestion, and freight traffic is expected to nearly double in the next twenty years,” said Jim LaBelle, Vice President of Chicago Metropolis 2020. “CREATE, the \$1.5 billion project intended to make freight movement more efficient, has begun at a slow pace, but Canadian National is proposing to invest its own money on the EJ&E to help achieve the goals of CREATE. It could yield substantial transportation and economic benefits for the entire region.”

Chicago Metropolis 2020 recommended the STB approve the acquisition with the following conditions:

- Enable other large railroad companies to connect to the EJ&E tracks, a move that would allow rails to carry more crosstown freight shipments that otherwise would be loaded onto trucks traveling area roadways.
- Guarantee equal or better Amtrak service into Chicago. Amtrak now uses CN’s St. Charles Air Line, an important railroad link near McCormick Place, and the acquisition could allow CN to abandon that line, which has great potential for redevelopment for other uses.
- Ensure safe and expanded mass transit service by bus and rail on routes that cross EJ&E tracks.
- Enable the Regional Transportation Authority to plan and implement efficient transit service in the EJ&E corridor.
- Mitigate negative impacts on local communities where train traffic would be expected to increase due to expanded use of EJ&E tracks.

Chicago Metropolis 2020’s statement to the STB also suggested a series of questions that should be addressed by an environmental impact study, which the STB is to conduct prior to acting on the CN’s proposal to acquire the EJ&E.

The full text of Chicago Metropolis 2020’s statement is available at www.chicagometropolis2020.org.

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