



The Village of Glenview

NEWS RELEASE

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VILLAGE OBJECTS TO ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR PROPOSED AMTRAK HIAWATHA EXPANSION PROJECT

October 18, 2016 – The Village of Glenview Board of Trustees today passed a resolution objecting to the findings in the Environmental Assessment (EA) recently completed by the Federal Rail Administration (FRA), the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) regarding expansion of Amtrak’s Hiawatha passenger service.

Amtrak wants to expand its Milwaukee to Chicago Hiawatha commuter service from seven to 10 round trips each day. To deal with rail congestion in the region, the Hiawatha expansion would include building a new, elevated 10,000-foot “holding track” for freight trains through the middle of Glenview – between West Lake Avenue and Techny Road. Glenview takes issue with the findings of the environmental assessment in terms of the true need for the project, the impact on residents’ health and safety, and property values, as well as the need for long-term solutions to regional rail congestion issues.

“The Environmental Assessment fails to present clear and convincing evidence for the need to expand the Hiawatha service as proposed in the project,” Deputy Village Manager Don Owen said. “It really creates more questions than it answers. We know construction of the holding track within a highly-populated residential area would potentially create more noise, diesel fumes, and a 10,000-foot-long wall of ugly steel freight and coal containers parked in our neighborhood.”

Village officials, working closely with a local rail expert, did a thorough review and analysis of the EA that was issued October 6. The Village’s objections focus on three main areas:

- **Need:** The recommendations to construct the holding track are driven by Amtrak’s perceived need to expand the Hiawatha service, but the data outlined in the EA does not support a need for expansion. The EA states total Hiawatha ridership is less than 40 percent of the current capacity. In fact, ridership has decreased steadily since 2012.
- **Impacts on Residents:** The Village is challenging the EA’s findings of the environmental impact on residents near the proposed location for the A-20 holding track.

(more)

The EA provides no data on air quality, noise, and other health and safety impacts for residents living adjacent to the proposed holding track. The potential negative impacts call for completion of a more comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS. Additionally, building the holding track at the proposed location will negatively impact the property values and quality of life for those who live and work in the adjacent neighborhood. In contrast to freight trains that currently pass by, residents will be forced to contend with idling diesel train engine noise and exhaust and its effects on their families and homes, as well as a view of hundreds of freight containers, for some virtually right in their back yard.

- **Lack of Long-Term Solutions:** There is a real issue of serious rail congestion and existing conflicts at underperforming crossings in the region, including those at Rondout and Deval. The alternatives being put forward in the EA do nothing to address the larger issues, but instead propose using significant state and federal funds to fix private rail conflicts supposedly created by the proposed additional Amtrak service. Only Alternative 5 – which was not recommended, and which proposes a 30-mile freight bypass of the congested area – offers a true long-term solution to addressing the passenger and freight issues. It demands more serious consideration and evaluation.

“We need a fiscally responsible, big-picture approach that provides long-term solutions to alleviate passenger and rail congestion issues for the entire region, not some ill-conceived, short-term ‘Band-aid,’ ” Owen said.

The Village intends to file a formal letter of objection with WisDOT, IDOT, and the FRA during the EA public comment period. Additionally, residents are encouraged to make their own opinions known on this issue by submitting comments to:

DOTChicagoMilwaukeePassengerRailEA@dot.wi.gov. Comments or questions can be submitted at any time during the EA process through November 15.

Amtrak, WisDOT, IDOT, and the FRA will hold a public involvement meeting on from 5 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, November 2, at Park Center, 2400 Chestnut Avenue, in the Lakeview Room. Residents will be able to review plans and share their concerns in person with project officials.

Leading up to that meeting, the Village will hold a community meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday, October 26, at Park Center, in the Lakeview Room, where residents can learn more about the proposal and submit comments.

For more information, visit the web site at: <http://www.glenview.il.us/Pages/hiawatha.aspx>

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