

## (August 21, 2008) Chicago Tribune: Congressman Dan Lipinski jumps aboard Canadian National deal

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-train-support-21-aug21,0,3463246.story>

Canadian National Railway's bid to buy the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway gained momentum this week as a key congressman joined a coalition of suburban leaders throwing their support behind the controversial deal.

U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.) and the alliance of mayors and village presidents from Buffalo Grove, Crete, Des Plaines, North Riverside, Riverside and South Holland say the proposed purchase could reduce or eliminate CN train traffic in certain corridors, leading to fewer blocked crossings, idling trains and middle-of-the-night train whistles.

Lipinski's support is key to the coalition, which plans to back the proposal officially at a news conference Thursday. As the only Chicago-area member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Lipinski helps oversee the U.S. Surface Transportation Board, which will decide on the purchase.

His endorsement puts him at odds, however, with other U.S. representatives from the suburbs. Democrats Melissa Bean and Bill Foster and Republicans Judy Biggert, Peter Roskam and Don Manzullo have criticized the deal.

Many suburbs along the EJ&E would see a tripling or quadrupling of freight trains, and their leaders oppose the plan. But Chicago and close suburbs support the deal because they would see fewer trains.

Lipinski said he waited to endorse the proposal publicly because he still had questions about its impact on Amtrak and Metra. Metra has said in documents filed with federal regulators that CN's plan has the potential for "major disruptive delays in commuter rail service, which would have devastating effects on the riding public."

The announcement comes less than a week after CN asked the Surface Transportation Board to rule by Oct. 15 on its proposed purchase of the EJ&E—months before a final environmental analysis is expected. In return, CN said it would not reroute its freight trains onto the EJ&E line until the board acts on the environmental analysis.

CN said it would continue to work with communities along the EJ&E to reach voluntary agreement on lessening the impact of additional freight trains. Many suburbs, including Aurora and Barrington, want federal regulators to require CN to include overpasses as part of their approval of the purchase.

Lipinski, whose district covers the Southwest Side and south suburbs, said he understands the need for overpasses along the EJ&E, but said they are "not easy or inexpensive to build." Fair or not, he said, CN will pay only a fraction of the cost for overpasses, although he will push the railroad to put up more of its own money.

"That's the way it has been done throughout recent history," Lipinski said.

CN plans to use the EJ&E tracks, which form a 198-mile arc from Waukegan to Joliet to northwest Indiana, to divert freight traffic around Chicago's congested rail corridor.

CN faces a Dec. 31 deadline to close on the \$300 million deal with U.S. Steel Corp., EJ&E's owner. But the transportation board has said it will not commit to making a decision by then.

Motorists would face long delays at 15 rail crossings in a dozen area communities if the deal was approved, according to a draft environmental impact report. The report also identified 10 suburbs where increased freight traffic could hinder emergency responses.

"I understand all the problems and inconveniences that are caused by rail traffic," Lipinski said. "Unfortunately, I can't really say, 'OK, no more freight trains are going to run through northeastern Illinois. We need to make the best of the situation that we can.'"