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## (October 16, 2008) The Reporter: Oak Lawn wants more answers about rail plan

Oak Lawn wants more answers about rail plan (The Reporter 10.16.08)

By William Jones

Oak Lawn trustees on Tuesday once again withheld giving their support for Canadian National Railway's proposed purchase of another rail company.

Trustees voted unanimously to table a resolution of support for Canadian National's (CN) plan to acquire Elgin, Joliet & Eastern (EJ&E) Railway. CN has stated that the purchase would allow the company to redirect freight traffic around Chicago, resulting in fewer freight trains daily in Oak Lawn, Chicago Ridge and Evergreen Park

A Canadian National representative gave a short presentation and fielded questions from Oak Lawn officials at Tuesday's Village Board meeting, but Trustee Carol Quinlan (District 5) requested to table a resolution of support because she said she believes the board does not have enough information about the direct impact of the proposed deal on Oak Lawn.

The proposal, being championed by U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D- 1, Western Springs), must first be approved by a subunit of the U.S. Department of Transportation. The deal could reduce the number of trains by 8.6 daily in Oak Lawn and Chicago Ridge, and 3.4 in Evergreen Park. Train traffic would increase in areas near EJ&E tracks, but many area officials believe the proposal would create a better balance of traffic for the region

The deal would most directly affect Oak Lawn near 108th Street and Central Avenue. The freight tracks at that location are not actually owned by CN, said CN senior manager of U.S. public and government affairs Jim Kvedaras. Indiana Harbor Belt owns the lines, but CN uses them as a transfer for nine to 10 trains daily, which would be reduced to one to two per day, Kvedaras said.

Several Oak Lawn officials have said they like the idea of fewer trains traveling through the village, but on Tuesday were unsatisfied Kvedaras could not adequately answer questions about the deal's impact on Oak Lawn.

Quinlan wants to know how the proposal would affect her attempt to find funds for an overpass or underpass at 108th Street and Cicero Avenue. She said news articles have reported CN does not have the money for such a project.

Kvedaras responded that rail lines are private property, and any separation between tracks and a walkway or roadway is for the benefit of the municipality. CN does work with village engineers and might be willing to cover a percentage of the cost, he said.

Quinlan said she believes the board should try to get a representative from Indiana Harbor to come speak about the overall impact of the proposed deal to Oak Lawn.