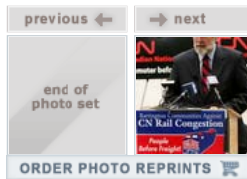




Barrington Hills Village President Robert Abboud, with Barrington Village President Karen Darch behind him, asks elected officials to play a larger role in making sure communities are not hurt by CN's proposed purchase of the EJ&E.

Gilbert R. Boucher II | Staff Photographer



Suburban leaders rally against the CN-EJ&E buyout

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They've voiced their opposition to Canadian National's proposed purchase of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway Co., but Tuesday suburban leaders tried to take the message directly to shareholders.

The leaders from Barrington Communities Against CN Rail Congestion and The Regional Answer to Canadian National, however, were escorted out of a Chicago hotel before they could get an audience at the CN shareholders meeting there Tuesday.

At a rally later nearby, representatives of both groups said they want to make it clear they'll do everything in their power to derail the sale, unless CN makes the investment to fix all the potential problems.

Among Tuesday's speakers were Barrington Mayor Karen Darch, Barrington Hills Mayor Robert Abboud and Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner.

"CN's plans to redirect freight into our communities present a hazard to public safety, economic stability, our environment and traffic," Darch said.

Communities along the EJ&E are concerned about the additional freight trains CN intends to put on that line if the sale is complete.

The letter to shareholders asked them to find a reasonable balance between profit and CN's corporate responsibility to be a good neighbor.

"The negative community impacts on safety, traffic gridlock, property values and overall quality of life along the EJ&E created by this acquisition cannot now or ever be adequately resolved to accommodate transforming the EJ&E from the equivalent of a small country road into a rail freight 'superhighway' in many places in our region," the letter stated.

CN proposes a \$300 million acquisition of the EJ&E, which runs in an arc from Waukegan to Gary, Ind. The line would become a bypass route for CN freight trains.

CN President and CEO E. Hunter Harrison has said diverting freight traffic to the EJ&E line will mean less road-level train crossings in many communities and a better environmental impact on the entire Chicago region.

"The added vehicular delay (at gates) would be between 5 to 10 seconds per driver," Harrison in a news release. "For motorists, this would not be much different than having to face one more traffic light in their journey."

CN spokesman Jim Kvedaras said the EJ&E sale was mentioned at Tuesday's shareholder meeting but wasn't the main focus. The rally had no effect on the meeting, he said.

The federal Surface Transportation Board, which has final say over the sale, is studying its potential environmental impact.



Opponents said they expect a decision from the board by the end of the year and are confident the deal will be blocked.