

Congressman listens to Plainfield officials' pleas for help

By [Geoff Ziezulewicz](#) Chicago Tribune January 27, 2015

U.S. Rep. Randy Hultgren visited Plainfield on Friday for a session where local leaders gave him a rundown of issues for which they could use help from the federal level.

Chief among Plainfield's concerns was the impact of Canadian National Railway train stoppages that have [regularly snarled traffic in town](#).

"The CN issues continue to be a concern for us," Village Administrator Brian Murphy said, according to a recording of the event, which was held at Village Hall.

Token progress has been made, Murphy said, including CN governmental staff meeting with Mayor Michael Collins.

"They said they'd take a look at our concerns," Murphy told Hultgren. "I guess they're still looking at our concerns."

CN trains have in the past stopped on the tracks within Plainfield, due to a "hot box" sensor on the track, blocking crossings of Routes 126, 30 and 59 in the process, all of which converge near downtown.

Collins said the problem is often compounded because train crews reach their maximum work hours as the train is being inspected after the sensor alert, and more time is then spent waiting for a new crew to arrive and relieve them.

Such stoppages also impact the ability of police officers to respond to emergencies, multiple Plainfield officials told Hultgren.

The Republican congressman and Plainfield staff also discussed a longed-for extension of 143rd Street.

Under the plan, 143rd would be extended east from Illinois Route 59 and connect to Illinois Route 126, offering the town's industrial area a much faster way to access Interstate 55 without jamming up downtown with never-ending semi traffic.

Public Works Director Allen Persons said the project would involve erecting a 900-foot-long, elevated bridge over the DuPage River and wetlands.

The environmental assessment phase of the project is complete and shows "minimal impact on wetlands," Persons said.

"This project is at least in the \$20 million range; it may be a little higher," he told Hultgren. "We hope that some funding, whether it's an increase in the gas tax or areas at the federal level, would make its way to Illinois so we could work with (the Illinois Department of Transportation) on these very important projects."

Any extension of 143rd would involve a four-lane road flanked by sidewalks and new traffic signals, Persons said.

Such a project would cut down Plainfield companies' overhead by offering them a faster route to I-55, Trustee Garrett Peck said.

Hultgren said that CN trains blocking town intersections and impeding emergency vehicles could bring more "push or leverage" to any attempt to get federal funding for the 143rd Street project in the coming months.

Plainfield officials told Hultgren that the extension would help vehicles get around blocked crossings caused by stopped CN trains.

"If trains are blocking crossings, to have that alternative route, that could be a very compelling part of the presentation," Hultgren said.

Hultgren said that Plainfield was "such an exciting community."

Local, regional and federal cooperation is key in this day and age, he said, when no massive federal coffers exist and earmarks can no longer be tacked on to spending bills.

"That's appropriate," Hultgren said, "but we have to make sure we are communicating and locking arms ... finding ways to get good projects done."