

Durbin blasts CN, warns feds could increase monitoring

By Marni Pyke Daily Herald

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin pulled out the threat of extending federal oversight of the Canadian National Railway in a letter to its CEO citing "poor communication and cooperation."

Durbin accused the railroad of undercutting Amtrak expansion to Galena, brushing off local leaders and breaking its word on crossing delays.

"Even minor safety issues are dismissed out of hand," Durbin wrote CN President Claude Mongeau on Tuesday.

CN spokesman Patrick Waldron said Wednesday the railroad was preparing a response to Durbin and could not comment yet.

In 2008, the Surface Transportation Board approved CN's request to buy the smaller EJ&E Railroad, which extended in a half-circle from Waukegan to Joliet. Suburbs traversed by the EJ&E fought the plan, citing extra freight train traffic. The board imposed numerous conditions on CN as a result and included a period of federal oversight until January 2015.

"It may be prudent to extend this period while the problems outlined above remain," Durbin stated.

The problems include lengthy delays at rail crossings although CN claimed track improvements would decrease blockages, Durbin wrote, noting towns such as Aurora and Barrington are concerned about the safety of trains carrying oil and ethanol.

The Springfield Democrat also claimed that CN ignored a request from Richton Park for an easement to install fencing.

CN also has thwarted Amtrak expansion in Illinois by dragging its heels on sharing tracks for a route from Chicago to Rockford to Galena, he said. "The only feasible rail route west from Rockford to Galena runs along CN," Durbin wrote. The project will not proceed to Galena "as long as CN slow-walks negotiations and makes unreasonable capital demands."

The STB in 2008 agreed with CN's contention that the merger would benefit the region by reducing freight traffic in Chicago by moving it out to the suburbs.