

**RESOLUTION  
ROCK COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

LAND CONSERVATION  
COMMITTEE  
INITIATED BY



THOMAS SWEENEY  
DRAFTED BY

LAND CONSERVATION  
COMMITTEE  
SUBMITTED BY

NOVEMBER 16, 2016  
DATE DRAFTED

**CONTINUED OPPOSITION TO THE GREAT LAKES BASIN TRANSPORTATION, INC.  
RAIL PROJECT IMPACTING ROCK COUNTY'S  
AGRICULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

1 **WHEREAS**, Resolution 16-5A-026 titled Opposition To The Proposed Great Lakes Basin  
2 Transportation, Inc. Rail Project passed County Board on May 12, 2016 which opposed the Great Lakes  
3 Basin Transportation, Inc. proposal to construct a new rail project in the eastern section of Rock County,  
4 which commenced east of the City of Milton and headed south to and east until it reached the most  
5 southeastern corner of Rock County dissecting some of Rock County's most prime farmland; and,  
6

7 **WHEREAS**, the Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. has since amended said preferred route  
8 commencing east of City of Milton traveling in a southerly direction and then westerly crossing the  
9 Rock River, just south of West Beloit Rock Townline Rd. and then in a south westerly direction to the  
10 State Line, west of the City of Beloit. The amended route continues to transect Rock County's prime  
11 farmland; and,  
12

13 **WHEREAS**, the Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. continues to state their intent is to purchase a  
14 two hundred foot wide corridor over the project route, approximately thirty (30) miles, which is  
15 estimated to remove approximately six hundred and twenty six (626) acres of prime farmland from  
16 production increasing the potential loss of farmland by 56 acres over the previous route, also the loss of  
17 woodlots increases to over sixty three (63) acres; and,  
18

19 **WHEREAS**, the Rock County Board of Supervisors continues their commitment to the preservation of  
20 Farmland with in Rock County by virtue of the adoption of the Rock County Purchase of Agricultural  
21 Conservation Easements Program (PACE) in 2011 and adoption of the Farmland Preservation Plan in  
22 1977 and all its' amendments to present. The County Board has also granted yearly allocations of  
23 financial resources for the implementation and continuation of these programs; and,  
24

25 **WHEREAS**, the Land Conservation (LCC) and the Planning and Development Committees continues to  
26 support the preservation of farmland by participating in the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program  
27 since 1977. This program has allowed the development of zoning ordinances within the townships of the  
28 county for the long term protection of the County's farmland; and,  
29

30 **WHEREAS**, the County Board supports all the aforementioned activities associated with the  
31 preservation of farmland within the county's boundaries with the understanding that agriculture is a vital  
32 component of the total Rock County Economy. According to University of Wisconsin Extension Service  
33 the loss of agricultural production and loss to the agriculture service sector associated with the amended  
34 route is estimated at six hundred seventy eight thousand seven hundred and eighty one dollars (\$678,781)  
35 annually (2016 dollars); and,  
36

37 **WHEREAS**, the LCC understands the construction of the proposed rail line will not only remove the  
38 estimated prime farmland from production but will also fragment numerous farms and fields leading to  
39 an increase in production costs of agricultural commodities to those impacted; and,  
40

41 **WHEREAS**, the amended mapped route of the rail line will also impact the established surface and  
42 subsurface drainage networks that keeps thousands of acres of prime farmland productive, resulting in an  
43 untold number of surface and subsurface drainage systems needing to be updated; and,

16-12A-190

CONTINUED OPPOSITION TO THE GREAT LAKES BASIN TRANSPORTATION, INC. RAIL  
PROJECT IMPACTING ROCK COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Page 2

44 **WHEREAS**, there are numerous negative impacts that haven't been considered, including but not limited  
45 to the fragmentation of woodlots, impacts to wetlands, impacts to wildlife habitat resources, and impacts  
46 to the surface and groundwater resources of the county; and,

47  
48 **WHEREAS**, all the towns that will be directly impacted by the initial proposed rail project, Milton,  
49 Johnstown, Bradford, and Clinton have gone on official record in opposition to the proposed rail line and  
50 the townships impacted by the amended route, Milton, Johnstown, La Prairie, Turtle and Beloit have also  
51 gone on record in opposition to the rail line; and,

52  
53 **WHEREAS**, Rock County has been a member of the Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission  
54 (WRRTC) since 1982 with nine other counties in Southern Wisconsin and the WRRTC is the owner and  
55 is responsible for safe and reliable local rail service of the existing infrastructure that the proposed rail  
56 line will connect into; and,

57  
58 **WHEREAS**, Rock County along with nine other Counties have invested over five hundred thousand  
59 dollars (\$500,000) each for capital improvements for the safe and efficient local rail service; and,

60  
61 **WHEREAS**, the WRRTC and Wisconsin Department of Transportation is under a lease agreement with  
62 the Wisconsin Southern Railroad for use and maintenance of all WRRTC infrastructure; and,

63  
64 **WHEREAS**, the WRRTC has expressed concern regarding the costs associated with the needed rail  
65 improvements with the proposed increase in rail traffic which will force the commission to upgrade the  
66 current rail from a Class I to a Class II system with an estimated cost of nine hundred thousand  
67 (\$900,000) per mile of rail. The Rail Commission estimates approximately 40 miles needing this upgrade  
68 at a total cost to exceed thirty six million dollars (\$36,000,000); and,

69  
70 **WHEREAS**, The Rock County Board of Supervisors sent a letter date June 3, 2016 to the Surface  
71 Transportation Board regarding the Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. Rail Project which identifies a  
72 desired alternative route by expanding the Chicago's CREATE program rail initiatives north to directly  
73 connect to Class I rail operators and the Port of Milwaukee.

74  
75 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Rock County Board of Supervisors duly  
76 assembled this 15<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2016, goes on record in opposition to the Great Lakes Basin  
77 Transportation, Inc., rail project or any amendments to the proposed routes that will impact the Rock  
78 County's agricultural sector, its untold impacts to the County's natural resources and the financial  
79 implications to Rock County for upgrading the existing rail infrastructure. The County continues to  
80 support the alternative route by expanding the Chicago's CREATE program rail initiatives north; and,

81  
82 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the County Clerk forward this Resolution to Wisconsin Governor  
83 Scott Walker; Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, Cathy Stepp; Secretary of the  
84 Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection, Ben Brancel; Senator Steven Nass;  
85 Senator Janis Ringhand; Representative Don Vruwink; Representative Deb Kolste;  
86 Representative Amy Loudenbeck; Representative Mark Spreitzer; US Senator Ron Johnson;  
87 U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin; U.S. Representative Mark Pocan, U.S. Representative Paul Ryan, and  
88 Dave Navecky, Office of Environmental Analysis, Surface Transportation Board.

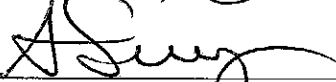
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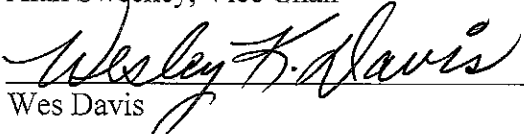
Page 3


Respectfully submitted:

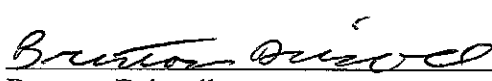
LAND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

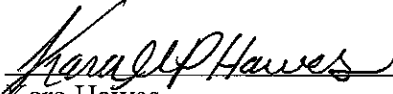
  
Richard Bostwick, Chair

  
Alan Sweeney, Vice Chair

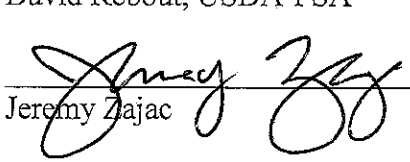
  
Wesley K. Davis  
Wes Davis

  
Absent  
Anders Dowd

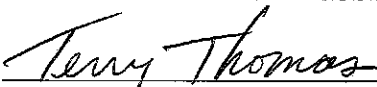
  
Brenton Driscoll

  
Kara Hawes

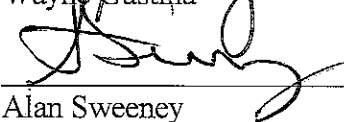
  
David Rebout, USDA-FSA

  
Jeremy Zajac

RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSION

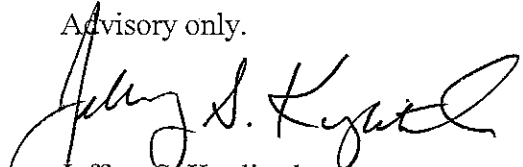
  
Terry Thomas, Chair

  
Wayne Crustina

  
Alan Sweeney

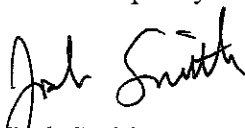
LEGAL NOTE:

Advisory only.

  
Jeffrey S. Kuglitsch  
Corporation Counsel

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTE:

Matter of policy.

  
Josh Smith  
County Administrator

FISCAL NOTE:

No fiscal impact at this time.

  
Sherry Oja  
Finance Director

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This resolution is advisory.

The Land Conservation Committee remains opposed to the construction of the proposed Great Lakes Rail project through Rock County due to impacts on Agriculture community. Rock County has a rich history in the protection of farmland through participation in the following programs, the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program and the Rock County PACE Program. Even though the programs differ in their approach to the protection of Farmland the net result is that productive farmland is protected from development.

The loss in production from converting over 626 acres of crop land to the rail corridor is estimated by UWEX Ag Agent Nick Baker. Per Mr. Baker the estimate is based on the following information. The typical crop Rotation of 2 years corn 1 year soybeans and using the Rock County average revenue as a base bench mark the expected minimum revenue per acre would be \$769.50. This would be an immediate economic reduction to any farm that the proposed Rail would cross through. Using the proposed map of the most updated route there would be a loss of over 626 acres of crop land from production in Rock County, with a loss of revenue exceeding \$481,707 annually in the form of reduced crop production. It should be noted that actual yields and revenue could higher and that these values are a baseline county average representing the minimum expected losses to Agriculture Production in Rock County. Mr. Baker also noted that the loss of revenue from the Agriculture service industry is estimated at \$197,074. This estimate includes losses associated with providing seed, fertilizer, herbicide, agronomy services, fuel, equipment and financial support to the acres removed from production. Using the United States average operating costs of \$356.92 per acre of corn and \$180.65 per acre of soybean production the additional economic impact in losses to local businesses would exceed \$197,074 annually in lost sales and services. The total estimated impact in loss revenue from the farmland conversion is estimated to be \$678,781 annually (2016 dollars).

Numerous environmental impacts that include but not limited to the fragmentation of woodlots, impact to wetlands, and impacts to wildlife habitat resources. The construction of the rail line as proposed will fragment large tracks of woodlots resulting in further fragmentation the existing blocks of wildlife habitat in the immediate area of the line. Studies have shown that as land is divided by manmade structures, various terrestrial wildlife population shrink. The rail line will intercept numerous large and small wetland complexes within the County. The filling of wetlands leads to reductions in many valuable functions, including retaining stormwater, filtering pollutants, protecting shorelands, and providing habitats for fish and wildlife.

The Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission (WRRTC) has expressed concern of the financial impacts the proposed Great Lakes rail line will have on the existing rail infrastructure. The net result of the proposal will be a cost of approximately \$900,000 per mile of rail to change from a Class I to a Class II rail to accommodate the expected increase in traffic. This cost will be born to the WRRTC and hence the tax payers of the state.

The Land Conservation Committee continues to support the expansion of Chicago's CREATE Program to the North to directly connect to Class I rail operators and an opportunity to access the Port of Milwaukee.