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## South Loop residents argue for CN's plans

Feds biased the process, they claim

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Editor

Canadian National's proposal to buy a railway that cuts through suburban Chicagoland and shift freight traffic there has been met with hostility from residents in the towns that would bear the brunt of increased train traffic.



Two Canadian National trains idle on the St. Charles Airline. File 2008/Staff

CN now routes freight trains through the city, including the St. Charles Airline near 16th Street in the South Loop. The company argues the trains are frequently delayed as they pass through Chicago, costing time and money. It's not uncommon to see a **CN** train idling on tracks near Burnham Station, a condominium development near 16th Street and Clark.

Now two South Loop residents-both live in Burnham Station-are arguing that the debate about **CN's** proposal has ignored benefits the city would reap if **CN** started using the suburban route, known as the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway.

Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Chris Berry both teach at the University of Chicago and spoke on Sept. 8 at a meeting about the environmental impact of Canadian National's proposed acquisition of the EJ&E line.

"The debate has been framed in terms of regional benefits-economic, environmental-and so on vs. local costs for suburbs," Bueno de Mesquita said. "The debate has ignored the benefits for the city."

The National Surface Transportation Board, the federal agency reviewing Canadian National's proposed move, has biased the process by favoring suburban concerns over those of the city, Bueno de Mesquita said.

"They have not actively solicited the input of the city, although if you look at the demographics and numbers, there are significantly more people in the city who would benefit," Bueno de Mesquita said, from **CN's** move.

According to an analysis by Bueno de Mesquita and Berry, just one of the seven of the board's

meetings about costs and benefits of the proposed move was held in the city; six were in the suburbs. Only one of 22 outreach meetings about the acquisition's impact on minorities was held in the city. There will only be one meeting in Chicago about the environmental impact of the move.

The city residents who would benefit if **CN** moved are more likely to be from a minority group and have lower incomes than suburban residents dealing with increased train traffic, the analysis says. And there are more people in the city who stand to benefit.

Using census data, the analysis shows that more than 1.2 million people in Chicago would benefit from less train traffic, pollution and other effects if **CN** moved to the suburban line. Seventy percent of this group is non-white. They have a median income of \$46,000.

Just over 900,000 suburbanites would bear the costs of increased train traffic and its effects. This group is two-thirds white and wealthier, with a median income of \$75,000, according to the analysis.

"Given that the benefits to city neighborhoods and the region as a whole clearly outweigh any harm faced by the suburbs, serious leaders should devote their efforts to creating ways to offset suburban costs rather than blocking the deal," the analysis reads.

"There's a natural political clout story there to be told there," Bueno de Mesquita said.

A spokesman for the Surface Transportation Board said he could not comment on a pending proposal and did not reply to a list of questions about the locations of public meetings.

The public comment period about the environmental impact of **CN's** purchase and move to the suburbs is open through Sept. 30.

Third Ward Ald. Pat Dowell supports **CN's** plans, as does the Greater South Loop Association, which hosted a meeting featuring a **CN** representative earlier this year.

Dowell said she's not sure some of her South Loop constituents would have heard about the meeting in downtown Chicago if she hadn't promoted it. South Loop residents, she said, have complained about the trains running through their neighborhoods. Suburban communities have forgotten that Chicago residents have dealt with the trains for years, she said.

"They'd have a few more trains running through their suburban communities. That's very different than having trains sitting idle for hours, make noise, clanging and spewing diesel fumes," Dowell said. "The money should be invested alleviating the negative impacts-grading, buffering, whatever. They should spend time on mitigating the negative impacts."

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