

**RESOLUTION
ROCK COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

LAND CONSERVATION
COMMITTEE
INITIATED BY



THOMAS SWEENEY
DRAFTED BY

LAND CONSERVATION
COMMITTEE
SUBMITTED BY

APRIL 20, 2016
DATE DRAFTED

**OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED
GREAT LAKES BASIN TRANSPORTATION, INC. RAIL PROJECT**

1 **WHEREAS**, Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. has proposed to construct a new rail project in the
2 eastern section of Rock County, commencing east of Milton heading south and east until it reaches the
3 most southeastern corner of Rock County dissecting some of Rock County's most prime farmland; and,
4

5 **WHEREAS**, the Great Lakes Basin Transportation, Inc. has stated that their intent is to purchase a two
6 hundred foot wide corridor over the project route, approximately twenty four (24) miles, which is
7 estimated to remove five hundred and seventy (570) acres of prime farmland from production; and,
8

9 **WHEREAS**, the Rock County Board of Supervisors is committed to the preservation of Farmland
10 with in Rock County by virtue of the adoption of the Rock County Purchase of Agricultural
11 Conservation Easements Program (PACE) in 2011 and adoption of the Farmland Preservation Plan
12 adopted in 1977 and its' amendments; and,
13

14 **WHEREAS**, the Board of Supervisors has continued to support the PACE Program in Rock County
15 through allocation of financial resources for the implementation and continuation of this program; and,
16

17 **WHEREAS**, the Land Conservation and the Planning and Development Committees support the
18 preservation of farmland by participating in the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program since 1977.
19 This program allowed the development of zoning ordinances within the townships of the county for the
20 long term protection of the County's farmland; and,
21

22 **WHEREAS**, the County Board supports all the aforementioned activities associated with the
23 preservation of farmland within the county's boundaries with the understanding that agriculture is a vital
24 component of the total Rock County Economy. According to University of Wisconsin Extension Service
25 the loss of agricultural production and loss to the agriculture service sector is estimated at six hundred
26 eight thousand six hundred and fifteen dollars (**\$608,615**) annually (2016 dollars); and,
27

28 **WHEREAS**, the LCC understands the construction of the proposed rail line will not only remove the
29 estimated prime farmland from production but will also fragment numerous farms and fields leading to
30 an increase in production costs of agricultural commodities to those impacted; and,
31

32 **WHEREAS**, the mapped route of the rail line will also impact the established subsurface drainage
33 network that keeps thousands of acres of farmland productive, resulting in an untold number of
34 subsurface tile drainage systems needing to be updated; and,
35

36 **WHEREAS**, there are numerous negative impacts that haven't been considered, including but not limited
37 to the fragmentation of woodlots, impacts to wetlands, impacts to wildlife habitat resources, and impacts
38 to the surface and groundwater resources of the county; and,
39

40 **WHEREAS**, all the towns that will be directly impacted by the proposed rail project, Milton, Johnstown,
41 Bradford, and Clinton have gone on official record in opposition to the proposed rail line; and,
42

43 **WHEREAS**, Rock County has been a member of the Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission
44 (WRRTC) since 1982 with nine other counties in Southern Wisconsin and the WRRTC is the owner and

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45
46 is responsible for safe and reliable local rail service of the existing infrastructure that the proposed rail
47 line will connect into; and,

48
49 **WHEREAS**, Rock County along with nine other Counties have invested over five hundred thousand
50 dollars (\$500,000) each for capital improvements for the safe and efficient local rail service; and,

51
52 **WHEREAS**, the WRRTC and Wisconsin Department of Transportation is under a lease agreement with
53 the Wisconsin Southern Railroad for use and maintenance of all WRRTC infrastructure; and,


54
55 **WHEREAS**, the WRRTC has expressed concern regarding the costs associated with the needed rail
56 improvements with the proposed increase in rail traffic which will force the commission to upgrade the
57 current rail from a Class I to a Class II system with an estimated cost of nine hundred thousand
58 (\$900,000) per mile of rail. The Rail Commission estimates approximately 40 miles needing this upgrade
59 at a total cost to exceed thirty six million dollars (\$36,000,000).


60
61 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Rock County Board of Supervisors duly
62 assembled this 12th day of May, 2016, goes on record in opposition to the proposed Great Lakes Basin
63 Transportation, Inc., rail project in its present planned location due to its negative impact on the
64 agricultural sector of Rock County, its untold impacts to natural resources and the financial implications
65 to upgrade the existing rail infrastructure; and,

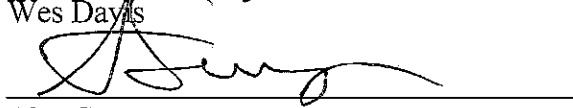
66
67 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the County Clerk forward this Resolution to Wisconsin Governor
68 Scott Walker; Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, Cathy Stepp; Secretary of the
69 Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection, Ben Brancel; Senator Steven Nass; Senator
70 Janis Ringhand; Representative Andy Jorgensen; Representative Deb Kolste; Representative Amy
71 Loudenbeck; Representative Mark Spreitzer; US Senator Ron Johnson; U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin;
72 U.S. Representative Mark Pocan, U.S. Representative Paul Ryan, and Dave Navecky, Office of
73 Environmental Analysis, Surface Transportation Board.


Respectfully submitted:

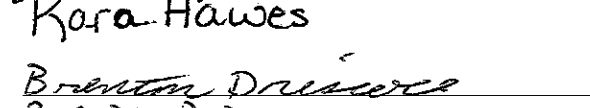
LAND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE


Richard Bostwick, Chair

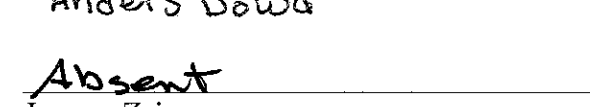

Wes Davis


Alan Sweeney


Kara Hawes



Brenton Driscoll



Anders Dowd



Absent
Jeremy Zajac


David Rebout

RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSION



Terry Thomas, Chair


Wayne Gustina


Alan Sweeney

LEGAL NOTE:

Advisory only.



Jeffrey S. Kuglitsch
Corporation Counsel

FISCAL NOTE:

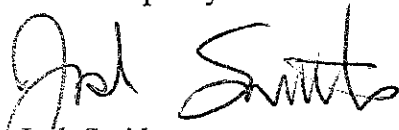
No fiscal impact at this time.



Sherry Oja
Finance Director

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTE:

Matter of policy.



Josh Smith
County Administrator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This resolution is advisory.

The Land Conservation Committee is opposed to the construction of the proposed Great Lakes Rail project 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 570 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 current proposed map there would be a loss of over 570 acres of crop land from production in Rock County, with a loss of revenue exceeding \$438,615 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 \$170,000. 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 \$170,000 annually in lost sales and services. The total estimated impact in loss revenue from the farmland conversion is estimated to be \$608,615 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.