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## Great Lakes Basin requests another extension on rail line application

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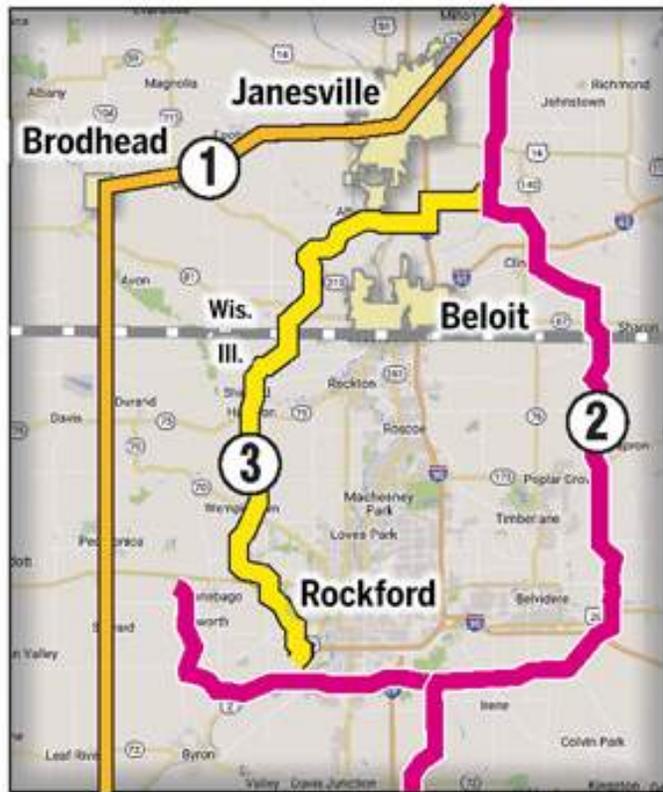
XAVIER WARD  
Wednesday, March 1, 2017

The company proposing a contested rail line through Rock County has asked a federal board to extend its application deadline for the line until April 30.

Great Lakes Basin Transportation on Tuesday asked the federal Surface Transportation Board to halt the environmental review of its proposed rail line until the company officially files an application, which it has

# GREAT LAKES BASIN RAILROAD

## Proposed railroad paths



Tony DiNicola/tдинicola@gazettextra.com

Great Lakes Basin's original route, labeled No. 1, was proposed in 2015. It started in Milton, passed through Janesville and turned south at Brodhead on its way to Chicago and ultimately Indiana. The second route, proposed in March 2016, ran east of Milton and through rural Clinton before heading south. The most recent route, proposed in September 2016, runs west from Milton, veers between Beloit and Janesville, and heads south on the west side of Beloit.

"It's already affecting us in a very negative way," Melin said, noting that the controversy has been emotionally taxing on communities that oppose the plan.

The proposed rail line is designed to cut transit times by allowing trains to circumvent the congested Chicago area on their way to Indiana.

The current route—the third proposed by the company—would start in Milton, veer west between Beloit and Janesville and then head south into Illinois. Earlier routes ran near Clinton on the county's east side or near Brodhead on the county's far west side.

The proposed line is a Class 5 rail, which accommodates trains

not done yet, company officials confirmed.

Great Lakes Basin was given until Tuesday to either give a project status update or submit its application to the board, which ultimately will decide whether the rail line can be built.

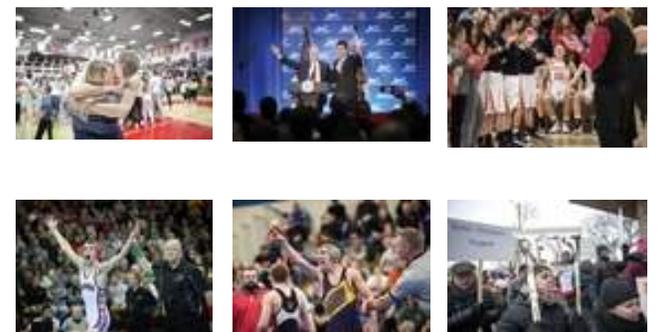
The company issued a letter requesting the extension. But Mirjam Melin, co-founder of local opposition group Rock Against the Rail, did not think that was an adequate response.

"This letter is not a status report. It's basically a letter saying they didn't have their homework finished," Melin said. "It proves again they are totally unprepared."

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traveling up to 70 miles per hour.

In its letter, Great Lakes Basin said it was still working with a group of stakeholders.

“We are holding discussions with potential customers, shippers and other parties (that) may file statements in support of the application,” according to the letter. “These discussions are ongoing and are expected to continue for several more weeks.”

The company will not disclose which rail carriers and shippers it has met with, attorney Mike Blaszak said.

“We're working with our advisers and our supporters to come up with an application that would be persuasive to the Surface Transportation Board,” Blaszak said.

Rock Against the Rail on Feb. 14 filed a supplemental motion with the Surface Transportation Board to block the project.

The motion argues the proposed rail line is illogical because it's not needed, would harm the environment and has failed to generate interest among major rail lines.

According to the motion, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific have publicly stated they are not interested in using the proposed bypass.

The motion also argues that Canadian National, another railway, would not use it because the company has its own Chicago bypass.

Melin disputes Great Lakes Basin's assertion that the rail bypass would cut transit times through Chicago from 33 hours to seven hours.

She said the Chicago Regional and Environmental Efficiency Program, which was created in 2003, has made an effort to cut those times.

Intermodal and manifest trains—which make multiple stops and haul multiple kinds of freight—need roughly 32 hours to travel through Chicago, according to a recording of a Chicago Metropolitan Planning Council meeting.

Unit trains, which haul one commodity such as coal and don't

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make stops, take about 15 hours under the transportation initiative.

“In the past, before (the program), it took about 20 hours for a unit train to go through Chicago,” Melin said.

Research on the initiative was conducted by transportation research firm Cambridge Systematics.

Blaszak declined to comment on the discrepancy between the company's transit time estimate and that of Cambridge Systematics, but he said the rail line would not only be for unit trains.

In a letter to the Surface Transportation Board, state Rep. Amy Loudenbeck, R-Clinton, said she was disappointed with Great Lakes Basin's lack of preparation.

Melin said she hopes the Surface Transportation Board is willing to pressure the company to give a status update. She said the public currently doesn't know any more than it did in December, when the company requested its first extension.

The board has not issued a response to Great Lakes Basin's request for a second extension.

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