

## County board supports DOT input on rail line from Indiana to Milton

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JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted to ask the Surface Transportation Board to consider the Wisconsin Department of Transportation’s input related to construction and operation of a rail line from Indiana to Milton.

Currently before the Surface Transportation Board (STB) is a request from Great Lakes Basin Transportation Inc. for the authority to construct a rail line in Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. The primary purpose for the project request is to relieve rail congestion within the Midwest, specifically the main rail hub of Chicago. The proposed route currently is from approximately La Porte, Ind., looping around the Chicago area and ending in Milton, Wis.

“What they’re looking at is almost a 200-foot swath anywhere from five to six rail lines in this area, trying to get the transportation up,” Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier said. “For Rock County, that’s the main concern. It wouldn’t affect Jefferson County in the same manner, but it’s still a concern. ... The purpose of the resolution tonight is, we want to re-enforce the comments made by WisDOT as the position of Jefferson County moving forward.”

On the Environmental Impact Statement, the DOT asked to participate as a cooperating agency to ensure that Wisconsin’s interests are represented and to review railroad operations in Wisconsin to



### COUNTY RETIREES

COUNTY RETIREES — The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday recognized seven county employees who have retired in the last quarter of the year. Combined, the seven served the county for more than 192 years. Shown above, left to right, are Michael Rusch, who served the Sheriff’s Office for more than 15 years; Sue Torum, more than 36 years at the Human Services Department; Judy “Polly” Wollin, more than 46 years at the Human Services Department; Michael Onheiber, more than 23 years at the Clerk of Courts Office; Terry Cerny, more than 13 years at the Sheriff’s Office; and Susan McCulloch, more than 33 years at the Clerk of Courts Office. Not pictured is Nancy Toshner, who served 25 years in the Human Services Department. — Daily Union photo by Alexa Zoellner.

ensure any new system would be a partnership and would not result in reducing services in the state; alternative routes that would limit construction of the new railroad corridor in greenfields of Wisconsin, including an option of no-build in Wisconsin that still would allow linkage to the state; crossing and safety concerns; the impact upon Wisconsin communities and the Wisconsin Southern Railroad, and alignment with DOT planning.

Jefferson County Supervisor Augie Tietz, a member of the Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission (WRRTC), explained that county officials were made aware of this about three or four months ago.

“We really didn’t understand the impact until we started following some of the things that were happening in Illinois and Rock County,” Tietz said. “There’re pros and cons on this. It could be good for our economic development, but then a 200-foot-wide corridor running up through the middle of our prime farm land would not be good for us.

“The DOT has given their opinion and their stance on how they want to see this happen in Wisconsin,” he continued. “We’re more or less endorsing what they are saying and that is, ‘yes, we like the possibilities, but we don’t want you creating new 200-foot corridors. If you’re going to use anything, use the existing corridors and do not affect the current rail system as it stands today.’”

From Milton, the new main line would integrate within the Wisconsin Tier 1 system and local rail system run by Wisconsin Southern Railroad on behalf of the WRRTC.

The impact specifically to Jefferson County is unknown both from the environmental impact and opportunities to assist in commerce or potential passenger capacity.

There are two main initial concerns: preservation of prime agriculture lands and coordination with existing trail systems that were established when portions of the local rail system were abandoned.

“The urgency is because (Wednesday) is the last day of the filing, so this way we’re on record and we will get notification of anything that comes up in the future from that transportation board,” Tietz said.

In other business, the county board:

- Approved creating a full-time intake/on-call worker position and eliminating a full-time Child Protective Services ongoing professional I position at Jefferson County Human Services Department.
- Accepted a bid for Hillside window replacement from Jefferson Glass of Jefferson, at an amount not to exceed \$45,800.

- Approved designating the Glacial Drumlin Trail through Jefferson County as part of United States Bike Route 30.
- Recognized seven retirees: Michael Rusch, Sue Torum, Judy “Polly” Wollin, Michael Onheiber, Terry Cerny, Susan McCulloch and Nancy Toshner.