

New rail route would run west of Beloit

By RYAN SILVOLA Staff writer | Posted: Friday, September 23, 2016 4:00 pm

BELOIT — The new proposed route for the Great Lakes Basin Transportation (GLBT) rail line runs west of Beloit and won't go through Boone County in Illinois as was originally planned.

The alternative route to GLBT's proposed rail line was submitted to the Surface Transportation Board on Tuesday. The new route was created because of environmental concerns voiced by the public.

In a letter submitted to the Surface Transportation Board on Tuesday, GLBT reports the new preferred route presented for consideration is 260.26 miles long versus the 281 mile original preferred route. GLBT believes this new route will have fewer environmental issues and will be the most cost effective network solution.

GLBT stated in the letter public input allowed GLBT to move the railroad around a city boundary that was not on their map, avoid a water well field, move further away from a middle school, gain more efficient alignments into two industrial sites, reduce some greenfield interruption in Wisconsin and eliminate the alignment through Boone County.

As of July 5, the Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA), which operates the Surface Transportation Board, had received more than 3,500 comments from citizens concerned about the environmental impact of the rail line. The commenters suggested alternative routes should be examined that would have less of an environmental impact.

The line is proposed to extend from La Porte, Indiana, through Illinois to Milton, Wisconsin.

The GLBT altered the route from Rockford to Milton, because the route to Wisconsin added another county to the route's footprint and increased the rail line's length, and the east side route had to go further east to clear population areas around Belvidere, Illinois, as well as move away from the Interstate 39 development corridor.



Proposed route

This is the map submitted by Great Lakes Transportation, Inc., on Tuesday showing the company's alternative route for its rail line. GLBT submitted alternative routes due to environmental concerns from the public.

The alternative routes being considered provides improved rail access for the industrial park south of the Chicago/Rockford International Airport. The alignment over the Rock River also provides an improved gradient and approach over the north side of the river and clearance over Highway 2. The new route will run west of Rockford and will provide rail access to industrial development without going through any residential developments or schools, according to GLBT.

The new route runs west of Beloit before it turns east to go between Beloit and Janesville borders in an industrial area. The route turns northeast and north around the east side of Janesville to join the original route to Milton.

OEA requested via letter on July 5 that GLBT submit alternative rail line routes by Aug. 29. OEA stated in the letter that alternatives must be developed for consideration before the organization can issue a Final Scope of Study for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

On Aug. 29, GLBT requested an extension to Sept. 20, because the company would have its engineering drawings finalized that week, but the presentation maps and narrative would not be complete.

On Sept. 9, OEA sent another letter to GLBT requesting more information in preparation for the EIS, including providing the average number trains per day for each segment during the first year of operations and identifying the average operating speed and train length for trains on each segment.

A spokesperson for the Surface Transportation Board couldn't be reached by press time. For more information, visit greatlakesbasinraileis.com.

The privately funded \$8 billion rail line would relieve congestion and would allow the railroads to better handle traffic from Chicago and the suburbs while making room for potential growth in the future, according to GLBT.

GLBT reports that modern signaling and controls would allow for the movement of up to 110 trains daily, and rail line transit times through the Chicago area would be reduced to under eight hours. Transit times can currently take up to 30 hours to complete.