



openlands

conserving nature for life

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Daniel Cronin, DuPage County Board Chairman
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Re: Opposition to Closing Aurora Branch of the Prairie Path

Dear Chairman Cronin:

I am writing you to express opposition to closing a significant portion of the Aurora Branch of the Prairie Path.

Together, DuPage County, Openlands, and many other partners helped to establish the Prairie Path in 1963 as the nation's first 'rail trail'. It set an excellent precedent for re-purposing unused rail lines into recreation amenities that connect people with nature where they live, as well as providing attractive transportation corridors for non-motorized uses. The Prairie Path remains a vital piece of our organization's legacy, and we care deeply about its future.

It is from this deep care for the Prairie Path that we express our concern about a pending proposal that will close 1.6 miles of its Aurora Branch between Interstate 88 and Eola Road. We understand that DuPage County is conducting a detailed analysis of a proposed alternative to this trail segment. We sincerely appreciate this significant investment in trail users' safety, as well as the County's willingness to maintain the Prairie Path as a viable recreational and transportation feature. However, we support maintaining the existing trail configuration for the following reasons.

1. The existing Aurora Branch is entirely off-road, which provides a safer and more pleasant trail experience than the proposed alternative, which adjoins busy roads.
2. It is unclear that a lower-cost solution to managing problematic rail traffic has been fully pursued with Canadian National Railroad.

3. Full costs of the proposed alternative have not been established, and may eventually exceed costs of upgrading the existing Aurora Branch.
4. Instead of navigating one at-grade railroad crossing, the proposed alternative creates two problematic crossings with many more risky interactions with road traffic. Costly new trail bridges over Interstate 88 and Diehl Road will be required in the future.
5. The current detour via Frontenac and Diehl Roads provide a safe rail crossing for trail users.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the County's alternatives analyses be expanded to including the following considerations:

- a. A more detailed assessment of how to make the existing Aurora Branch configuration viable, such as via grade separation of the existing railroad crossing;
- b. A more detailed accounting of the proposed alternative's financial costs, such as land acquisition and new bridge construction;
- c. Assessment of other trade-offs, such as on-road complications from debris and snow plow accumulation; and
- d. A role for Canadian National's participation in designing and funding the project. Alternatively, the County may consider legal options for appealing standing train traffic on Canadian National's tracks to the Federal Surface Transportation Board. (Similar appeals in Chicago and Evergreen Park recently reduced train standing times to less than ten minutes per day.)

Once again, I thank you for taking such a thoughtful approach for determining the future of the Prairie Path through DuPage County, and appreciate your careful attention to this important matter.

Very truly,



Gerald W. Adelman,
President & CEO