

Traffic volume, noise increase since rail lines switch hands, residents claim

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DYER | Train traffic has doubled and the noise level has increased since Canadian National Railway bought the former EJ&E line in 2009, several hundred Dyer residents say.

They're angry, and they do not think the town did its due diligence while negotiating with CN five years ago.

Residents of the Hearthstone and Rockwell subdivisions, which border the tracks, attended the Dyer Town Council study session Thursday night to talk about the situation.

"The 500 residents of Rockwell and Hearthstone got a bad deal," said Bryan Oberc, who along with Mark Drendt spoke on behalf of both communities during the meeting.

There were missed opportunities when CN came to the table, they said, and a binding agreement with the railroad was signed two days before the Surface Transportation Board released an environmental impact statement calling for a sound barrier along populated tracks.

The agreement signed by Dyer did not cover sound barriers. Dyer got quiet zones at two of its rail crossings and \$250,000 earmarked for economic development.

Among the things quiet zones do is restrict trains from blowing their whistles.

"It's disheartening," Oberc said.

Since CN took over the line, train traffic in Dyer has doubled and is expected to triple, Oberc said. He and Drendt have taken the lead in the situation and have worked closely with Town Administrator Rick Eberly.

In monitoring the situation, they have found that decibel levels along the tracks rise well above safe levels.

The CN track is the east-west line that runs under Calumet Avenue and to the north of the Rockwell and Hearthstone developments.

Oberc, Drendt and their neighbors are asking the town to make things right and spend the \$250,000, which remains largely unspent in the town's economic development fund, on a sound barrier for Rockwell and Hearthstone.

According to an estimate from a local landscaper, an evergreen sound barrier could be installed for \$250,000, they said.

While sympathetic to residents' concerns, Dyer officials, including Town Attorney Bill Enslin, outlined the difficulties ahead for such a plan.

Dyer would have to put the barrier project out to bid "which would (raise) the costs," Enslin said.

"Then there would be engineering involved," he said.

The question of where to put the barrier is even more important.

Unless the town could obtain permission for an easement from every resident along the line, the barrier would have to go on railroad property, and obtaining permission for that would take years, Enslin said.

Eberly said he has contacted CN in hopes that it will voluntarily help mitigate the situation.

"I've had no response," he said.