

CITY OF OTTAWA
301 West Madison Street
Ottawa, Illinois 61350



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 18, 2010

RE: Illinois Railway Yard Improvements/blocking Route 23 crossing

Illinois Railway is making improvements in its Ottawa yard which will result in substantially decreasing the time that its trains block the Route 23/Columbus Street crossing.

According to Johnnie DeClue, General Manager, in 2008 Illinois Railway installed a new switch at the west end of the Ottawa yard to give it more options during switching time in the morning. This was to accommodate increased rail traffic. However, the freight business with Ottawa and Wedron sand plants, as well as Pilkington, has increased substantially, causing switching times to increase. In order to accommodate for these latest increases in rail traffic, Illinois Railway has announced a plan to utilize track capacity at the Ottawa yard to the best of its ability. The first switch was completed on August 12, 2010 at the west end of the yard, which now gives the railway the ability to access all tracks at that end of the yard.

According to DeClue, the second switch construction will begin almost immediately at the east end of the Ottawa yard near Champlain Street, and it too will give the railway the ability to access all tracks from the east end of the yard. DeClue said, "both of these switching projects will give the railway the ability to move railcars more fluently through the yard. Before the tracks were all stub-ended and crews were constantly running back and forth from one end to the other end to put away cars and switch trains."

The final step, the biggest, will be to add a new rail that will accommodate sixty (60) rail cars and a second switch to the track, all east of Champlain Street. This extension to the Ottawa yard should be the biggest help in alleviate the amount of time spent switching trains over the Route 23/Columbus Street crossing in the mornings. That project is expected to be completed in 2010.

Mayor Bob Eschbach noted that in discussions with Illinois Railway, he learned that the increased traffic blockages were the direct result of increased freight traffic, all from local industries. "The increase in the mining and use of sand in the area has resulted in additional employment for Pilkington, the mining companies, as well as the railroad itself," noted Eschbach.

Mayor Eschbach also noted that the Illinois Railway has been very cooperative in the past with respect to emergency vehicles. "The City has a system in place to immediately contact the railway if an emergency vehicle is expected to cross either the Columbus Street or Champlain Street crossings during times when switching might be expected. To date that appears to have worked well."

DeClue noted that Illinois Railway will continue to block the Columbus Street and Champlain Street crossings at times. He said "In no way are we saying that we will not block Route 23 at all during the morning switching hours, but we are taking huge strides to cut the time down as much as possible. We as a company have added jobs to the market, put unemployed people to work, helped bring more revenue into the city, and do sympathize with the public. We do not want to hold up their days anymore than what is needed to get the job done."