

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The City of Chicago is deeply concerned with ensuring the safety and well-being of its residents and communities; and

WHEREAS, Recent derailments involving Norfolk Southern Railroad Company in East Palestine, Ohio, and in Detroit, Michigan, as well as the derailment involving Canadian National Railway in Matteson, Illinois, have highlighted significant safety concerns and potential risks to public health and the environment; and

WHEREAS, The derailments underscore the need for enhanced safety standards and regulatory oversight to prevent future incidents and protect communities along railroad routes; and

WHEREAS, As a result of the February 2023 derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, the Department of Justice and the Environmental Protection Agency began the process of drafting a consent decree to enter into with Norfolk Southern Railroad Company; and

WHEREAS, The proposed consent decree identifies response and recovery actions aimed at near-term remediation and long-term health monitoring specific to the East Palestine region; and

WHEREAS, The tragedy that occurred in East Palestine resulted in a cloud of fumes traveling across as many as 16 states; and

WHEREAS, A derailment tragedy could happen anywhere that train tracks run through communities; and

WHEREAS, On June 27, 2024, residents and businesses in Matteson, Illinois, had to evacuate after 25 cars carrying various substances, including liquified petroleum gas, derailed; and

WHEREAS, While grateful no one was injured, this latest derailment is demonstrative of the public health and environmental risks communities with railroads face daily; and

WHEREAS, More trains carrying explosive crude oil pass through Chicago than any other large metropolitan area in the nation; and

WHEREAS, The Norfolk Southern Intermodal Yard and associated operations are in the process of expanding in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, As a result of a complaint alleging that the City discriminated on the basis of race and national origin in violation of Title VI, the Fair Housing Act, Section 109, and HUD's implementing regulations, the City of Chicago entered into a Voluntary Compliance Agreement

with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, requiring it to complete a Cumulative Impact Assessment describing how environmental burdens, health conditions, and social stressors vary across neighborhoods, and identify neighborhoods that experience the greatest cumulative impacts, or “Environmental Justice Neighborhoods;” and

WHEREAS, In September 2023, the Chicago Department of Public Health and the Office of Climate and Environmental Equity published its Cumulative Impact Assessment Summary Report and Chicago Environmental Justice Index Map; and

WHEREAS, The Cumulative Impact Assessment and Environmental Justice Index Map identified Englewood and other neighborhoods adjacent to Norfolk Southern Railroad Company’s operations in Chicago as among the most disproportionately burdened by cumulative impacts; and

WHEREAS, The ongoing discussions around the consent decree between Norfolk Southern Railroad Company, the Department of Justice, and the Environmental Protection Agency present a unique opportunity to expand the scope of the agreement to ensure that benefits and rail safety improvements are maximized nationwide;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the City Council of Chicago calls on the Department of Justice and the Environmental Protection Agency to expand the geographical scope of its consent decree with Norfolk Southern Railroad Company and ensure communities around the country are better protected from similar disasters by strengthening provisions related to operational improvements, transparency, and community involvement, and calls on the United States Congress and relevant federal agencies, including the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Railroad Administration, to strengthen and enforce railroad safety standards to mitigate the risk of accidents and derailments;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution shall be transmitted to the United States Congress, the Department of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Railroad Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board, Norfolk Southern Railroad Company, the Surface Transportation Board, the Chicago Metropolitan Area for Planning, and other relevant stakeholders to emphasize the City of Chicago’s support for improved railroad safety standards and expanded oversight measures.



Maria E. Hadden
Alderdwoman, 49th Ward