



Office of the City Clerk

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Legislation Text

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RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, In November of 2010, an investigation conducted by the Chicago Tribune found that thousands of Chicago commuters are exposed on a daily basis to high levels of toxic diesel pollution trapped in Chicago's two major rail stations and inside the trains they ride; and

WHEREAS, Using a handheld testing device to measure black carbon, a key ingredient of diesel exhaust commonly known as soot, Chicago Tribune investigators measured the air quality inside commuter trains and on platforms at Chicago's Union Station and Ogilvie Transportation Center, with startling results. Testing showed that commuters at these stations are exposed to high levels of diesel soot in the air; that the amount of soot steadily increases as commuters walk deeper into the rail station; that soot levels are even higher on platforms, where acrid blue clouds of diesel exhaust linger between trains; that the air inside train cars contains levels of diesel soot up to 72 times higher than on the streets outside; and that the level of soot in the air remains high during most train trips away from the City; and

WHEREAS, The United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") considers diesel exhaust to be one of the most dangerous types of air pollution. A complex mix of toxic substances such as benzene, arsenic and formaldehyde, diesel exhaust is filled with fine particles of soot that can lodge deeply in the lungs and penetrate the bloodstream. Breathing even small amounts of soot can inflame the lungs and trigger asthma attacks. Studies have linked exposure to diesel exhaust to a variety of health problems, including cancer, heart attacks, brain damage and premature death; and

WHEREAS, In response to the Chicago Tribune's investigation, Metra formed an Emissions Task Force to investigate the level of diesel emissions at its downtown stations and onboard its locomotive and passenger cars, and to identify ways to improve the air quality there. As part of this initiative, tests were conducted in each of these key locations for total particulate matter, fine particulate matter, carbon, carbon monoxide, nitric oxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and other diesel exhaust components; and

WHEREAS, On February 14, 2011, the Chicago Tribune reported that Metra's testing summary showed "alarming" pollution levels on some trains that are "more extensive and worrisome than [Metra] has publicly disclosed;" and

WHEREAS, Among other things, the Chicago Tribune stated that Metra's testing summary showed that "the highest levels of lung-damaging soot inside Metra's stainless steel cars were in outbound trains"; that "[l]evels at times spiked hundreds of times above what is normally found on urban streets"; that "the worst pollution generally was on trains leaving the south platform at Union Station"; that "[t]he highest soot levels on a single route were on a train leaving the Ogilvie Transportation Center"; that "[h]igher than normal levels [of soot] also were detected on outbound trains from the LaSalle Street Station"; that "[s]oot levels generally were highest inside the first car behind the locomotive, dropped in the second car and declined substantially in the last car"; and that "[soot] levels were dramatically lower on return trips downtown using the same locomotives"; and

WHEREAS, Typical soot levels in large urban areas are between 1 and 2 micrograms per cubic meter of air. The EPA has determined that levels of daily average exposure to soot levels in excess of 5 micrograms per cubic meter of air may trigger health problems later in life; and

WHEREAS, When one of Metra's oldest trains pulled out of the Olivie Transportation Center shortly after 4:00 p.m. on December 13, 2010, the Chicago Tribune reported that "soot levels spiked at 357 micrograms per cubic meter of air in the first car behind the locomotive and averaged 30 micrograms per cubic meter of air during the trip on the Union Pacific North line to Kenosha Similar patterns unfolded on all of Metra's diesel powered

lines." The problem is particularly acute when outbound trains leave Chicago stations; and WHEREAS, The health, safety and welfare of the 245,000 persons commuting to and from Chicago each weekday on passenger trains are of paramount concern to the Chicago City Council; and WHEREAS, Public hearings on diesel air pollution at Chicago's two largest passenger trains stations will shed light on this pressing health issue. Essential to this inquiry are answers to the following questions: What is Metra doing to investigate diesel emissions? What type of testing has Metra conducted in recent months at downtown train platforms, aboard locomotives and inside locomotive repair shops, and what did the tests show? What can be done to reduce locomotive emissions at these locations and to protect commuters from exposure to toxic diesel fumes? To date, what steps, if any, has Metra taken to add pollution controls to locomotives; to direct toxic exhaust away from passenger cars; to improve ventilation at Chicago's two major train stations; to upgrade Metra's older and less efficient locomotives and equipment; and to diminish the public health risks associated with breathing high levels of diesel exhaust?; now, therefore, BE IT RESOLVED, That we, the Mayor and Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, assembled this thirteenth day of April, 2011, do hereby direct the Committee on Health of the City Council of the City of Chicago to hold an informational hearing on the matter described herein, and to call upon Metra's Acting Executive Director William K. Tupper and other appropriate members of Metra's Emissions Task Force to testify relative to this matter.

derman James Balcer, 11th Ward