



Gulf Regional Planning Commission

Serving the Governments of the Mississippi Gulf Coast

April 13, 2021

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Ms. Allison Davis
Director, Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
April 13, 2021
Part of
Public Record

Re: Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Service/STB Finance Docket No. 36496

Dear Ms. Davis:

Since 2005, Mississippi has worked to recover from Hurricane Katrina. The hurricane devastated the entire Gulf Coast region and impaired local rail infrastructure, resulting in a halt to passenger rail service. Since then, residents have worked alongside local, state, and federal officials to have passenger rail service restored to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Amtrak should be applauded for filing its petition to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to permit the use of freight rail infrastructure for twice-daily passenger service on the Gulf Coast.

The Gulf Regional Planning Commission (GRPC) was established in 1962 and provides regional planning assistance to fifteen jurisdictions. GRPC has been involved in planning for multimodal options since its inception. Restoring passenger rail service to the Gulf Coast symbolizes our region's strides to recover from Katrina. Reconnecting the Gulf Coast to our nation's passenger rail network will help revive the coastal economy as it emerges from the pandemic by attracting tourists, facilitating business travel, providing a safe alternative to highway travel, and improving quality of life. Ultimately, rail passengers will have access to jobs, schools, and cultural facilities. The passenger rail connection is a critical component for economic development.

Passenger rail is also an essential and permanent part of our national transportation network. Amtrak has the right to access the necessary freight rail infrastructure, and Mississippi residents deserve to benefit from passenger rail service. Amtrak is prepared to begin operating two daily trains on the Gulf Coast route starting in 2022. I hope STB will look favorably on Amtrak's request.

Sincerely,
GULF REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Paul J. Gavin
Executive Director

cc: Service List for Finance Docket No. 36496