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April 14, 2021

302014

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

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
April 15, 2021
Part of
Public Record

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

Dear Ms. Davis:

As Mayor of the City of Diamondhead, I fully support launching passenger rail service between Mobile and New Orleans and requests an expeditious and fair hearing by the Surface Transportation Board of Amtrak's petition to start service in January 2022.

Since 2005, Mississippi residents have worked to recover from Hurricane Katrina, one of the strongest storms on record. This storm devastated the entire Gulf Coast region and impaired local rail infrastructure, resulting in a halt to passenger rail service. Since then, all other forms of transportation have returned to the Gulf Coast, except for passenger rail. More recently, Hurricane Zeta caused further damage to our coastal cities which further compounded the negative economic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Our local economies are in dire need of the economic energy that passenger rail could bring by attracting tourists and business travelers.

Our Mississippi residents have supported the work of local, state, and federal officials to see passenger rail service restored to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Passenger rail service is a part of the history and culture of Hancock County and was vital to building our local economy generations ago. A recent study by the University of Southern Mississippi projects tourism spending increase by \$37 million per year because of this service. This service, as proven in the past, will build a strong economy for Hancock County and trigger the rebound needed to recover from the Hurricanes and COVID-19 pandemic.

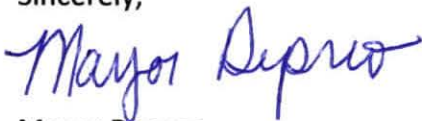
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Ms. Davis

I also believe working cooperatively with the Hancock County Port & Harbor Commission to coordinate use of the single track mainline between Port Bienville and Gentilly Yard in New Orleans and the maritime / barge traffic at the Pearl River and Rigolets Pass Bridges is important. I support finding a path forward for both transportation systems to work together.

For Mississippi, restoring passenger rail service is a symbol of the huge strides our state has made to recover from Katrina. Reconnecting the Gulf Coast to our nation's passenger rail network can also help revive the coastal economy as it emerges from the pandemic – attracting tourists, facilitating business travel, providing a safe alternative to highway travel, and improving the overall quality of life in Mississippi.

Passenger rail is 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 beginning in 2022. I hope STB will look favorably on Amtrak's request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mayor Depreo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mayor" and the last name "Depreo" clearly visible.

Mayor Depreo
City of Diamondhead

cc: Service List for Finance Docket No. 36496