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

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

Dear Ms. Davis:

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. In the years since then, residents have worked alongside local, state, and federal officials to see passenger rail service restored to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. I applaud Amtrak for filing its petition to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to permit the use of freight rail infrastructure for twice-daily passenger service between New Orleans and Mobile, with stops in Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi, and Pascagoula.

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,

Leonard Bentz
Executive Director

cc: Service List for Finance Docket No. 36496