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May 20, 2021

Ms. Cynthia Brown
Chief of the Section of Administration, Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20423

Subject: Proposed Railbanking of the North Coast Railroad Authority's Line from Willits, CA to
End of Line in Eureka, Samoa, Korb, and Carlotta, CA.
Surface Transportation Board Docket No. AB 1305 0 X

Dear Ms. Brown,

This comment, on behalf of the Humboldt Trails Council, is for filing in the above captioned proceeding. A copy is being forwarded to the North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA).

The Humboldt Trails Council (HTC) has carefully reviewed all the documents filed in this proceeding to date. HTC endorses the NCRA's Environment and Historic Reports submitted to the STB, and supports the NCRA's request for a Notice of Interim Trail Use (NITU) for all of its rail corridors and properties north of Commercial Street in Willits, CA. HTC believes that the railbanking of this corridor is critical to protecting this immensely valuable public resource so it remains dedicated for current and future transportation needs on the North Coast.

What is immediately possible if the NCRA corridor is railbanked north of Willits is the creation of the Great Redwood Trail (GRT). HTC has been intensively following and advocating for the GRT since Senator McGuire first proposed SB 1029. We have attended NCRA and California Transportation Commission meetings, and encouraged our more than 1,000 supporters to contact the Governor's Office and State Legislature at critical moments.

The State has conducted an extensive assessment of the NCRA and its right-of-ways, and is moving forward with the plans to create the GRT. The NCRA is committed to transferring the northern part of their corridor to the Great Redwood Trail Agency if their railbanking request is granted. This new State agency will have the expertise and funding to build the GRT and begin the environmental clean up of the Eel River Canyon over the years ahead.

The GRT on the NCRA corridor is critical for the development of a safe active transportation network in Humboldt County. It will link the cities and towns of Blue Lake, Arcata, Samoa, Eureka, King Salmon, Fields Landing, Lolita, Fernbridge, Fortuna, Rio Dell, and Scotia. It will also remediate environmental hazards created by years of neglect along the corridor. Between Arcata, Eureka, and Fortuna, the GRT is anticipated to have 1,000 to 2,000 users per day. This will be a boon to decreasing car trips, increasing recreation and health, as well as economic development throughout the North Coast.

The section of the NCRA's corridor that is proposed for railbanking passes through the Eel River Canyon, which has proven to be a very difficult place to maintain a railroad. However, what the future may hold for this corridor, besides the GRT, is unknown. Five years ago we never imagined a massive fiber-optic cable running from Singapore to Humboldt County, but it is already under construction. Perhaps the corridor will one day provide for an essential fiber-optic link to the Bay Area, or a freight system that has yet to be designed.

HTC is confident in the development of the GRT with the assistance of railbanking, and in the abundant public benefits that will accompany it. From environmental, economic, and health improvements, to active transportation networks throughout the North Coast, as well as protecting future transportation options. Without the railbanking most of this will be lost.

Thank you for your attention to our comments and this important moment in our North Coast's history.

Sincerely,

/s/ Bruce Silvey for Humboldt Trails Council

Please add Humboldt Trails Council to the service list in this proceeding.
Our email address is besmft@gmail.com and we consent to email service of pleadings.
CC: Parties of Record