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July 20, 2021

Ms. Cynthia Brown  
Secretary, Office of Proceedings  
Surface Transportation Board  
395 E Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20423-0001

RE: *Metro-North Commuter Railroad Company—Application for Adverse Discontinuance of Trackage Rights—Housatonic Railroad Company, STB Docket No. AB 1311.*

Dear Cynthia Brown:

Scenic Hudson is writing to express its strongest support for Metro North Commuter Railroad Company's (Metro North) Application for Adverse Discontinuance of Trackage Rights for the "Beacon Line," an inactive railroad line which runs from the City of Beacon eastward through Dutchess County.

Scenic Hudson has created several parks in Beacon, including Madam Brett Park, which is on the Beacon Line where it crosses over South Avenue. We believe that the discontinuance and subsequent railbanking process will allow Dutchess County, in cooperation with the City of Beacon and Metro-North, to develop the Beacon Line as a "rail trail" until such time that the rail line is needed. Once constructed, the rail trail will for the first time allow safe off-road bicycle/pedestrian access to Madam Brett Park from the Beacon waterfront where we own and operate Long Dock Park. This connection will better link the Main Street business district and adjacent neighborhoods with the waterfront – with its parks, train station, and cultural attractions.

This new trail would also close a remaining gap in a regional trail network. The eastern portion of this same rail line recently became host to the Empire State Trail. An expansion of that trail along the rail line to Beacon's waterfront will link the Empire State Trail to the waterfront communities and the north-south Hudson River Valley Greenway trail along the river, including the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, which will run from Beacon to Cold Spring along the Hudson River. Upon completion, these trails will create an unprecedented network of active transportation opportunities for residents, commuters and visitors to the region.

No passenger or freight rail transport has occurred on the Beacon Line for decades and there appears to be no prospect for rail transport into the future. Scenic Hudson believes that the Housatonic Railroad Company's Trackage Rights should be discontinued in order to allow this underutilized transportation corridor to be redeveloped and repurposed into a non-motorized multi-use path, a.k.a. rail trail.

Scenic Hudson is currently working with Dutchess County to redevelop the former CSX urban freight line in Poughkeepsie into a multi-use, non-motorized rail trail. We understand the value that converting underutilized railroad corridors into rail trails provides communities, and we are encouraged by Dutchess County's capacity to undertake such projects.

In conclusion, Scenic Hudson supports Metro North's application for Adverse Discontinuance of Trackage Rights for the Beacon Line. The discontinuance of Housatonic's Trackage Rights over the line will not result in harm to the public, nor will it negatively impact the public convenience and necessity. In fact, railbanking the Beacon Line will provide tremendous public benefit as it will allow for trail use while preserving the line in the event there is a future opportunity for rail service. Further, if in the future a bona fide opportunity arises for rail traffic, the proponent would be free to seek authority from the Surface Transportation Board to reactivate the line.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Anzevino  
Director of Land Use Advocacy

CC: All Parties of Record