

304104

March 7, 2022

The Honorable Martin Oberman, Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
March 15, 2022
Part of
Public Record

Dear Chairman Oberman and Members of the Surface Transportation Board,

Runnels County wishes to convey our serious concerns about harms Texas will experience if the Surface Transportation Board approves a proposed rule on forced reciprocal switching (EP 711-1). We want to make sure you are aware of our views on this matter prior to the public hearing on this topic.

This unnecessary new federal regulatory scheme would be extremely damaging to rail-served communities and businesses in Texas like ours in Runnels County over the long term. Forcing railroads to open their tracks to competitors at potentially below-market rates and without any showing of competitive abuse would have broad negative impacts on rail operations. Because our freight rail system is comprised of a complex, integrated network, these disruptions will reverberate throughout the system. The resulting harms to rail efficiency and productivity would also undermine the ability of railroads to earn enough capital to continue historically high levels of reinvestment in the rail network, thus further imperiling rail service for most shippers and communities.

Runnels County is home to the Texas Pacific Railroad, a Class III railroad that runs across West Texas from Coleman County to the international crossing at Presidio. This rail route and the communities along it have seen significant investment to bring a dedicated freight rail option to the region. For example, a new international rail bridge is being finalized between the towns of Presidio in Texas and Ojinaga in Mexico replacing an old wooden crossing that burned down fifteen years ago. When operational this international route would be the sixth railroad here in Texas that crosses the U.S.-Mexican border and would help to relieve other rail bottlenecks in Laredo, Eagle Pass and El Paso. Not only does this project represent a tremendous opportunity for Texas and American international trade, it represents an opportunity for economic development and freight transportation options here in Runnels County. Forced access policies would reduce capital for investment, lead to confusion and operational complexity at rail junctures, and could lead to bypasses of freight routes in rural areas. These consequences directly threaten the integrity of the national supply chain as well as transportation and investment planning in places like Runnels County.

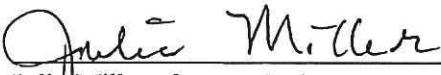
Texas' 54 railroads ranging from our local Texas Pacific to the large Class I's of Union Pacific and BNSF operate a statewide network of over 10,500 miles of track moving over 320 million tons of cargo annually. Not only does this system provide economic and transportation opportunities, it provides considerable ancillary benefits to local communities. Moving freight by rail helps to reduce congestion and pollution by removing vehicles off of our already overcrowded highways. This in turn leads to less wear and tear on local highways, especially rural roadways which often see heavy loads, translating to taxpayer savings and safer roads.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and in the face of continuing supply chain upheaval, railroads have proven to be uniquely nimble, resilient partners in America's interconnected transportation network. What has set railroads apart is their consistently high level of investment in infrastructure, technology and operations coupled with continuous innovation to meet the evolving needs of their customers.

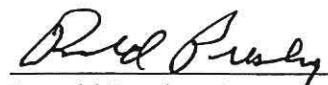
Whether it be at the national level or here in Runnels County, forced switching would undermine railroad efficiency and investment, exacerbate current supply chain challenges and threaten the long-term health and sustainability of the rail network. We urge you to reject this proposed new rule.

Sincerely,

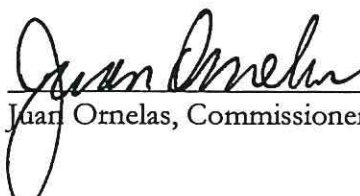
The Runnels County Commissioner's Court


Julia Miller, County Judge


Earl King, Commissioner Precinct #1


Ronald Presley, Commissioner Precinct #2


Brandon Poehls, Commissioner Precinct #3


Juan Ornelas, Commissioner Precinct #4

CC: Rep. August Pfluger, Senator John Cornyn, Senator Ted Cruz