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VIA E-FILING

Cynthia T. Brown, Chief of Section
Administration Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington DC 20423-0001

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ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
June 9, 2022
Part of
Public Record

June 9, 2022

Re: North Coast Railroad Authority – Abandonment Exemption in Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt Counties, California AB-1305X

Dear Ms. Brown:

This comment, on behalf of the City of Arcata, is for filing in the above-captioned proceeding. The City of Arcata is writing to express our strong support for the Great Redwood Trail Agency's/North Coast Railroad Authority's (GRTA/NCRA) motions to reject the pending notices of intent to file offers of financial assistance received by your office.

The City of Arcata manages the four mile Humboldt Bay Trail North as a rail-with-trail within the GRTA/NCRA corridor, which has become an essential public resource for community members, providing a safe, separated active transportation route and opportunities for active living while physically distanced. An average of 200 people per day walk and bike along the trail with even more use during the summer months, even though the Humboldt Bay Trail does not yet connect to Eureka. Expanding non-motorized trail opportunities along the GRTA/NCRA line will have a myriad of benefits for local communities including enhanced coastal access and safe, affordable transportation choices connecting disadvantaged communities. The City has also secured \$5.3 million in state Active Transportation Program funding to expand the trail north to provide a safe, separated non-motorized transportation route between downtown and north Arcata. Railbanking will be essential to realize the completion of this priority transportation project with our City.

The former Northwestern Pacific rail line runs from the San Francisco Bay Area through some of the most scenic, environmentally important, and impassible terrain in coastal California as it makes its way to Humboldt Bay along the Eel River Canyon. The line is both a 300-mile gem in the heart of California, and a treacherous former timber line that has bankrupted several companies attempting to operate freight rail service. Because of the precarious terrain and collapse of the timber industry in Northern California, service on the line has been financially and logistically infeasible for decades. The Federal Railroad Administration embargoed the line for safety reasons in 1998, and the embargo has never been lifted as to any portion of the line at issue here.

Three offers of financial assistance have been filed attempting to force GRTA/NCRA to sell its real property interest, purportedly to resume freight operations. None of them have or can establish any continued need for freight rail service on the remote north coast of California through one of the most geologically unstable terrain in the United States. There has been no freight rail service on this rail line since 1998. The 24-year and counting embargo puts the lie to the assertion that freight traffic is necessary on this line, as does the 25+ year period that the North Coast Railroad Authority attempted to bring the freight rail back to life and failed.

Conversion of the NCRA line for interim trail use, The Great Redwood Trail, will preserve this transportation asset for the future, facilitate local recreation and tourism, and protect and foster a variety of conservation and environmental values.

The deceptiveness of the argument that the market requires freight service on the applicant's line is clear in light of the following facts:

- No active freight carriers seek ownership of the line. None of the three offerors have ever engaged in interstate rail activities or currently operate freight rail.
- No active shippers or any possible shippers are located on the line. None of the three offerors demonstrate any specific continued need for freight rail service on the line.
- Two of the three offerors have never pulled a single carload of any cargo in any location.
- No product in the modern era has successfully been shipped along former North Coast Railroad Authority line.
- The entire line at issue has been embargoed for safety for over 20 years without serious effort from shippers or resources from private carriers to have the connection reestablished.
- The astronomical cost of a rehabilitating the line, several portions of which have fallen into canyons or waterways, would require exponentially more freight activity to be generated on the North Coast to rehabilitate and operate the line than has ever existed.

For the Surface Transportation Board (Board) to compel a state-created agency to sell its interest in this critical environmental and economic resource on the basis of such demonstrably absurd claims of a need for freight, would do grave injustice to the people of the State of California, and run afoul of the intent and terms of STB's regulatory authority.

Moreover, with respect to the request by the North Coast Railroad Company (NCRCo) for leave to file out of time its Notice of Intent to File an OFA, we respectfully urge the Board to reject this request outright. The Notice of Exemption in this abandonment proceeding was filed on May 14, 2021, so NCRCo has had ample notice about this proceeding which has been pending before the Board for over a year.

Based on the foregoing, we urge the Board to grant the GRTA/NCRA's motion to reject the notices of intent to file offers of financial assistance.

Certificate of Service. I hereby certify service by email attachment on June 9 on all parties of record in AB 1305X as of June 9, 2022.

Thank you for your attention to this most important matter.

Should you have any questions regarding the City's support, please do not hesitate to contact City Manager Karen Diemer at 707-822-5953 or kdiemer@cityofarcata.org.

Sincerely,


Stacy Atkins-Salazar, Mayor
City of Arcata