



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
CITY COUNCIL

MARK F. SQUILLA
ROOM 332, CITY HALL
Philadelphia, PA 19107
(215) 686-3458 or 3459
Fax No. (215) 686-1931
Email: mark.squilla@phila.gov

1ST DISTRICT COUNCILMAN

May 9, 2024

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

308339

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
May 28, 2024
Part of
Public Record

COMMITTEES

Chair
Streets and Services

Member
Education
Ethics
Finance
Fiscal Stability
Global Opportunities
Licenses and Inspections
Public Property and Public Works
Rules
Technology and Information Services
Transportation and Public Utilities
Whole

Re: City of Philadelphia – Petition for Declaratory Order, STB Finance Docket No. 36768

Dear Ms. Brown:

I am writing to provide my strong support for the Petition for a Declaratory Order (attached) filed by Washington DC based attorneys on behalf the City of Philadelphia and supported by the Center City District concerning the abandoned Reading Viaduct in Philadelphia

The Reading Viaduct is an abandoned rail line just north of the downtown that was once a vital industrial and commuter arterial. It is now a brownfield with overgrown vegetation, soil contaminants, and lead-based paint. It is owned by Reading International, a movie-theater company that took possession of railroad properties after Reading's bankruptcy in the 1970's.

All railroad operating rights were extinguished in 1984 with the construction of a new commuter tunnel servicing downtown. Reading has done nothing to improve this structure for more than 40 years and it has blighting and a negative public safety impact on adjacent low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. Reading's assertion that this a "railroad" is undermined by fact that connecting links on either end were demolished more than 40 years ago and Reading International removed and sold all the rail lines to support their primary business, running movie theaters. By claiming to be a "railroad" they have also not paid real estate taxes for more than four decades, while their neglect imposes significant operating costs on the City for clean-up and security in tunnels that pass over city streets.

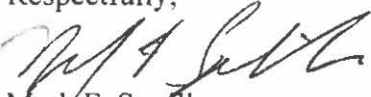
Reclaiming and renovating this derelict parcel will create a new public park in an area with few recreation facilities, connect neighborhoods to schools and job opportunities and spur inclusive, economic development in adjacent areas.

The Center City District, a private sector sponsored municipal authority that has already built four other parks in Center City Philadelphia, is actively raising funds to transform this into a community-oriented park and the sooner the STB resolves this issue, the sooner the City and CCD can achieve the site control necessary for many state and federal grants to turn this into a vital public amenity and link to economic opportunity.

We urge your rapid review and decision on this matter.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mark F. Squilla', written in a cursive style.

Mark F. Squilla
Councilmember, First District