



Callowhill Neighborhood Association
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Ms. Cynthia T. Brown
Chief, Section of Administration
Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001
May 13, 2024

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ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
June 17, 2024
Part of
Public Record

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

Dear Ms. Brown:

We, the Callowhill Neighborhood Association (CNA) Board of Directors, are writing to provide our strong support for the Petition for a Declaratory Order filed by the City of Philadelphia.

CNA, a 501c3 and RCO, is a community organization founded in 2000. Our boundaries are Vine St. to Spring Garden St. and Broad St. to 8th St. CNA aims to promote a cohesive community of residents, businesses, and institutions while retaining the diversity and character of this formerly industrial neighborhood. We aspire to enhance the quality of life for all members of the community and seek to make the neighborhood a better place to live, work, and pursue educational, cultural, and recreational activities through cooperative action. This section of the former Reading Railroad viaduct has been a blighting influence on our neighborhood for more than forty years, since rail operations ceased in 1984. Supporting the remediation of the Reading Viaduct has been one of our goals from our founding and CNA has been and continues to be an organization in support of and in service to the Rail Park.

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 does not own any railroad assets. When Reading Railroad went bankrupt, all railroad assets were transferred to Conrail, which then consummated the abandonment of the Viaduct as a rail line, with the approval of the federal government.

With all railroad operating rights extinguished by Conrail, Reading International has done nothing to maintain or improve this structure for more than 40 years. The abandoned Viaduct has



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blighting and negative public safety impacts on adjacent low and moderate-income neighborhoods. Reading International has resisted efforts to address the blighting impact of its properties by claiming that it is a railroad protected from local regulation by federal law. However, Reading International's assertion that this is a "railroad" is undermined not only by Conrail's abandonment of railroad rights associated with the Viaduct, but also by the 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 its primary business of running movie theaters..

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, including the first phase of the Rail Park, 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.
Sincerely,

Sarah McEneaney

cc:Hon. Mark Squilla, Mr. Charles Spitulnik, Mr. John Vorhees

Callowhill Neighborhood Association Board of Directors

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