

Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

Subject: Formal Opposition to Burnet-Lampasas Rail Expansion (STB Docket No. 36815)

Dear Members of the Surface Transportation Board,

The Texas Alliance of Land Brokers is writing to formally oppose the proposed Burnet-Lampasas rock-hauling rail line due to its severe environmental impacts on biodiversity, water quality, the rural landscape, and property values in the Texas Hill Country. This project threatens vital ecosystems, protected species, and water resources that are essential for the health and sustainability of our communities. As an alliance of real estate professionals, with approximately 500 members primarily in the Texas Hill Country, we urge the STB to reject this project unless these critical concerns are fully addressed:

1. Impacts on Biodiversity

The Texas Hill Country's unique topography and riparian zones cannot withstand the disturbance of riparian zones along Mesquite Creek, Sulphur Creek and subsequent Lampasas River watershed caused by 26.9 miles of new rail construction. These areas are essential for wildlife movement, breeding, and feeding. Habitat destruction from construction would further accelerate the decline of some species, many of which have already suffered due to unchecked development in the region.

2. Threats to Water Quality

Mesquite and Sulphur Creeks are spring-fed tributaries of the Lampasas River and serves as a vital waterway supporting aquatic life. Construction activities would increase sedimentation, nutrient loading, and pollution runoff into these creeks, which flows directly into the Lampasas River.

3. Threats to Landowners and Rural Communities The rail line would fragment agricultural and ranch lands, reducing property values and hindering wildlife movement.

Over 1,800 residents have petitioned against this project, citing inadequate public notification and rushed deadlines for input. The use of eminent domain to seize private land for a privately owned rail line sets a dangerous precedent, undermining property rights.

4. Cultural and Historic Preservation

The route passes near Thornal Cemetery (est. 1900) and Scott Hollow, a historic settlement. Construction noise, vibrations, and land disruption risk irreparable damage to these cultural landmarks.

5. Destruction of Native American Historical Areas

The proposed 27-mile rail line between Burnet and Lampasas, Texas, poses significant risks to Native American historical areas and artifacts in the Texas Hill Country, a region with deep Indigenous heritage. The Texas Hill Country is rich with Native American history, including ancient trails, settlements, and artifacts.

6. Environmental Review

An Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared for the proposed new rail line through Burnet and Lampasas Counties because the rail line is a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of our human environment. Per 42 U.S.C. 4331(a), Section 102 of NEPA, the Office of Environmental Analysis on behalf of the Surface Transportation Board is required to perform an Environmental Impact Statement to address the devastating effects the action will have on the area.

Requests for Action

- 1) Halt the project until a comprehensive, independent environmental review is conducted.
- 2) Prioritize upgrades to existing infrastructure (e.g., Highway 281 or the Austin Western Railroad) over new construction.
- 3) Require robust community engagement, including extended public comment periods and hearings in Burnet/Lampasas counties.
- 4) Protect Mesquite and Sulphur Creeks with enforceable buffer zones and stormwater controls to prevent sedimentation and pollution.

The Texas Hill Country's ecological integrity, rural character, and clean water resources are irreplaceable. This project prioritizes corporate interests over the health of our communities, ecosystems, and future generations. We stand with the 1,800+ petitioners in demanding the STB reject this ill-conceived proposal.

Sincerely,

Texas Alliance of Land Brokers