

ENTERED
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Re: Docket No. FD 36137 City of Fishers, City of Noblesville, and Hamilton County,
Indiana Petition for Partial Revocation of Exemption

Dear Ms. Brown: Enclosed for filing to the above-captioned proceeding are an original and ten copies of written comment regarding the "Petition for Partial Revocation of Exemption" filed on August 1, 2017 with the Surface Transportation Board (the "Board"). A copy of this comment has also been served on the attorney, Robert A. Wimbish, who is representing the collective owners, City of Fishers, City of Noblesville, and Hamilton County (the "Owners"), of a railroad line in Indiana.

I would like to start by thanking you for taking the time to read this letter, as I am sure you are very busy. My name is Patrick Webb, I am a resident of Goshen, Indiana and writing in opposition of the proposed Rail to Trail plan, concerning the track from I- 2.13 at Indianapolis, Indiana, to milepost I-39.69 at Tipton, Indiana. I feel that, should this plan go through, it will be an irreversible mistake. To explain why I am opposed to this plan, I will explain based on economic value, historical value, public interest, and alternative plan.

The Indiana Transportation Museum, who operated on the line, relied on the former Nickel Plate line for income. Trains such as the Polar Bear Express and the State Fair Train have proven to be popular. This means the Museum was self sufficient and supporting itself, requiring less tax dollars to keep it running. However, if only the northern section is kept, this will cut the State Fair Train, a large source of income. In the end, this will mean more tax dollars will have to be spent running the museum, adding to the plan proposing to tear up the line for \$9.3 Million. The ITM and group Save the Nickel Plate propose to raise the money for repairs themselves.

One of the biggest criticisms against the line is it is too expensive to restore, with \$5,000,000 being reported. Glenn Schwartz from the Hoosier Port Authority (who own the right of way) said from a report the HPA did, that it was realistically only \$55,000 for the line to be usable. The Port Authority President, accompanied by two FRA Certified inspectors, inspected the line himself. The inspectors pointed out areas "that should not have passed an FRA inspection or the inspections of ITM's track inspectors", but still had "the opinion that they were in fairly good condition for a tourist railroad." The trouble spots could have been fixed over time, or the HPA could have allowed the ITM to make these repairs, then lift the ban on the line. Instead, the HPA unfairly suspended the ITM as the manager of the line, an action which has been criticized.

\$9,245,000 tax dollars can be saved by repairing the track, instead of tearing up and paving the right of way, as this money would be raised by the operator of the line, not the state. Also considering that for the many crossing the trail will have with the road will likely double with safety bridges needing to be added, as predicted by BetterNoblesville.com. Also, the Federal Rail Administration said at the Noblesville Meeting that they inspected the track and said it was okay to run on. While the reported some safety concerns, they said these could be resolved in a few years, with the \$55,000 spent sooner, this will not not be a problem.

There is also the economical benefit of the line purely by its existence. According to Gutenberg.us, there are currently only four heritage railroads in Indiana, the Indiana Transportation Museum being one. This means that the ITM's Line is unique in our state. Rail Trails, according to the DNR, are not, as "Hundreds of miles have been added and many more are in development". This means the proposed trail will have serious competition, and people may simply stick with a trail closer to them, failing to bring in as much tourism as the line currently can. It has also been shown that tourists who rode the train would spend \$35-\$45 in local businesses; with a reported 40,000+ who came when the line was active, this came out to \$2,000,000. This means tearing up the line will not just hurt the Indiana Transportation Museum, but also the communities of Fishers, Noblesville and Hamilton County.

My next argument is historical value, the Nickel Plate is a valuable part of our state history, as the Nickel Plate, formed in 1887 once helped move our goods to towns such as Chicago, New York, and St. Louis. Now apart of Norfolk Southern, the Railroad Company continues to be remembered, with excursions on the mainline with the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society, and Indiana Transportation Museum, which mainly run former Nickel Plate Locomotives. This living museum is helping to preserve rolling stock on a line it ran on. The mainline has been apart of the towns of Fishers and Noblesville for decades, and to tear it up is to tear up history itself! As George Orwell said, "The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.". James R. Thompson, who was Governor of Illinois, said that "An important part of what the state does is preserving it's history". Tearing up this line will not be preserving Indiana's history, it will destroy it.

My next point is public interest. Many people have said they don't want for the line to be torn up. The petition on www.change.org "Save the Nickel Plate Road" as of this writing has 6,382 supporters. The petition "Pave the Nickel Plate", also on www.change.org, has only 144 supporters. If these surveys are anything to go by, they show that a majority do not want this line torn up. However, the Owners of the line have not given evidence to prove that they have listened to the public voice, as they continue to look at tearing up the line. The line is a public asset, and what happens to it should be done at the consent of the public. The owners, on the other hand, have failed to prove that they have polled the citizens of their respective cities and counties for their opinions.

Finally, I would like to explain that the opinion of myself and several others, that there is a much better plan in play concerning the line. The Hoosier Heritage Railroad, who're working with the ITM to preserve the line, have proposed that instead of tearing up the rails, why not built a trail beside the line? Going back to economical standpoint, this would also save a great deal of money, and cut the tax dollars required down from the 9.3 Million that has been proposed. There is at the moment no Rails-with-Trails in Indiana, but there is in New York, called the York Heritage Trail Rail, which runs right next to an active line. There is also one next to the Western Maryland, to name just a few examples. This would benefit the community best, as both sides

would be happy, and people would have more options. This would also make the line unique to Indiana, and people would come to see it.

Now you may wonder Mrs. Brown, why a Goshen resident cares about a line several hours away. For me, the line is a state treasure. It is an example of what we can accomplish, to connect our cities. This line has allowed the Indiana Transportation Museum a chance to be more than static displays, and give only a glimpse of when trains ran; it allows them to show how they run, and provide a service that is practical and enjoyed. For over 24 years the line has been used to move Fair Goers to the State Fair in Indianapolis. In the future, it could be used as a light rail, to help move commuters to and from work. But this will not be possible if the line is torn up.

In conclusion, I ask that the Board block any actions that will lead to the tearing up of the line, based on cost, the historical value, and the public interest that is opposed to it. I also ask that the board consider the Rail-with-Trail plan as the best compromise with both groups. With this, there will be an even stronger tourist attraction between Noblesville, Fishers, and beyond. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and I hope my input has been helpful.

Sincerely,

Patrick Webb

Patrick Webb

13764 State Road 4

Goshen, Indiana 46628

info@savethenickelplate.org