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Midwest Railway Preservation Society

September 8, 2017
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Ms. Cynthia T. Brown
Chief, Section of Administration
Office of Proceedings Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, S.W., Room 1034
Washington, DC 20024

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 historic railroad line in Indiana.

I am a 18 year-old resident of Cleveland, Ohio wishing to express my concerns for the proposed railbanking of historic Nickel Plate Railroad in the cities of Noblesville and Fishers, Indiana. I volunteer at a local railroad museum in Cleveland, and keep track of various efforts organizations do to preserve the history trains have in our nation. The Indiana Transportation Museum is known for having a unique collection of vintage and rare railroad equipment, including the 587, a 1918 steam locomotive currently being restored back to operation. I have always wanted to experience the facility for myself. The museum has operated on 37 miles of tracks, which are owned by the City of Noblesville, the City of Fishers, and Hamilton County. The railroad's owners have proposed a plan of railbanking the southern portion to the line (also the portion in best of condition, according to a volunteer at the Indiana Transportation Museum) and turning it into a trail connecting Noblesville and Fishers. Despite the efforts done by city officials in convincing this idea is for the benefit of both towns, there has been a large sense of displeasure coming from local citizens and railfans around the nation. It has been felt that the track owners have treated the museum and train supporters unfairly, angering many individuals who feel their voices have not been not properly heard.

Locals townspeople have enjoyed the train operations, as it gives their communities the classic "small town, USA" vibe that many American cities have lost. They not only associate the train with the history and legacy of the original Nickel Plate Railroad, but also of fond memories made while riding or watching the antique train. One of these memories is the Indiana State Fair Excursions that the museum operated. Numerous people have cherished memories of riding the train to the fair. Apart from having a sense of nostalgic value, it provided an alternative way of transportation to the fair. Without the train in session for the 2016 and 2017 Indiana State Fair sessions, it was reported that there was an increased

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amount of road traffic in the vicinity of the fairgrounds. Having the train and the fair work together provides the public with a unique and classic American experience, along with an efficient means of fair transportation.

As with many things, the internet has brought many people who share the same visions and interests together. The online train enthusiast community is no exception, and when news of the proposed "Nickel Plate Heritage Trail" was introduced to social media sites such as Facebook, many were in shock. On February 28th 2017, the first official post announcing the railbanking project on the City of Noblesville Facebook page had a large amount of comments expressing disappointment in the idea. A page has been created called "Save The Nickel Plate", as a way of keeping followers updated on the group's efforts to stop the railbanking process. Another page called "Noblesville Neighbors" is apparent in that it favors preserving the line's operations.

The line is unique in the sense that it remains one of a handful of railroads in the United States that goes right through several towns. When the train operates, it generates a crucial amount of visitors that provide income to the city's gas stations, lodging, restaurants, and other forms of business. It can also be noted that when steam locomotive 587 was in operation, it was key in attracting larger crowds. As of 2016, the locomotive's restoration was making reasonable progress, until the issues concerning railbanking developed. Apart from tourism, keeping the line in place can also benefit the cities of Noblesville and Fishers by providing a commuter train, forming another option for point-to-point transportation. A 2016 inspection done by the Federal Railroad Administration has stated that the tracks were in safe, operable condition. Yet, when the Hoosier Heritage Port Authority (which was established to purchase the 37-mile stretch of track) did its own inspection, the result was that the line needed several million dollars of maintenance to be safely operational again. Many have since questioned the likelihood of the HHPA inspection being a sensible one.

Despite meetings hosted by both cities concerning the issue, much of the public has agreed that their officials are ignoring what the citizens' opinions are; treating the Indiana Transportation Museum and train supporters unfairly. Some voters are outraged that the individuals they elected into office are being totally biased and inconsistent with what the citizens actually want. It has been said that both a trail and rail line can co-exist. For example, this has been proven on the popular Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio. Fishers mayor Scott Fadness has claimed this idea to be dangerous, yet ITM has done calculations saying this is possible. Many cities already have rail-trails, and the vast majority of people are not wanting a perfectly good line railbanked into a walking trail that is already too similar to others. The Monon Trail of Indianapolis is not only a good example of an identical trail nearby, but also has proved to be a key location for various types of crime. This means that if the Nickel Plate Railroad is railbanked, it could be a potential hotspot for criminal offenses within the communities it would serve. No survey has been conducted by either Noblesville or Fishers to gather information on the public's opinion.

To many local citizens and rail enthusiasts who have spoken out against the railbanking plans, it is more than just keeping a train that has been a popular attraction. People are upset that their leaders who are supposed to be representing their ideas and desires, have flat-out ignored and refused to consciously listen to the very individuals who have elected them into office. Many are convinced that the city officials have already made their decision, and are doing so without consulting the citizens, and those interested in the subject. Aren't the first three words of the Constitution of the United States of America "We the People"...

I certify that these comments have been provided to the Applicant's Attorney of Record via email. /S/
Sebastian Senter Marconi