



Newton Trails

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Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
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October 31, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

We appreciate this opportunity to comment regarding docket number EP-749-1, the proposal for LIMITING EXTENSIONS OF TRAIL USE NEGOTIATING PERIODS. Collectively, we have served the past decade as chairpersons of the board of directors for the non-profit Newton County Trail – PATH Foundation Inc. (aka Newton Trails).

Based on our experience working through the federal railbanking process in Newton County, Georgia, we urge the STB to reject the request to place restrictions on the time available for trail organizations and railroads to reach agreement under the National Trails System Act.

On July 26, 2013, in the matter of CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILROAD COMPANY--ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION--IN NEWTON COUNTY, GA. (docket number AB_290_343_X), Newton Trails filed with the STB a request for issuance of a Notice of Interim Trail Use (NITU). And, on August 19, 2013, with concurrence from Central of Georgia Railroad Company, the STB issued the requested NITU.

Over the succeeding 40 months from the initial filing, the Newton Trails board engaged in non-stop negotiations with representatives from Central of Georgia Railroad's parent company, Norfolk Southern. Acting as a non-profit without unified local government support for this project, Newton Trails faced many obstacles and delays in finding a workable agreement with a large and complex corporation. However, our perseverance was rewarded in September of 2016, with the reaching of an Interim Trail Use agreement and lease agreement which were only finalized and approved by the STB in November of 2016.

Since that agreement, Newton Trails has taken on management of the entire 14.9-mile corridor, clearing, opening, and maintaining seven miles of primitive (unpaved) trail for public use. Additionally, with extensive private and corporate financial support, Newton Trails has paved .7 miles of hard-surface trail in downtown Covington, GA to serve the wellness, transportation, and greenspace preservation needs of residents and visitors. The trail is used daily by hundreds of individuals, families, and organizations seeking outdoor recreation and active transportation. Newton Trails is also facilitating master planning and public/private partnerships expected to lead to an extensive trail network across Newton County within the next five to ten years.

Named the Cricket Frog Trail, this greenway is the embodiment of the United States Congress's original intent, under the National Trails System Act, to "provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population" and to "promote the preservation of, public

access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation."

It is noteworthy and extremely relevant to these proceedings that the Cricket Frog Trail could easily not exist today – and, the objectives of the trails act not have been realized -- were limits in place to restrict the negotiating period for trail use agreements. Our diligence pursuit for the interests of Newton County citizens and the significant expense incurred could easily have gone for naught and the opportunity been permanently lost had time lapsed.

It is thus our strong recommendation that the STB make no changes that impede the ability of trail organizations and railroads to reach good-faith agreements which serve both short and long-term public interests.

Sincerely,



Greg Richardson,

Chair, Newton Trails



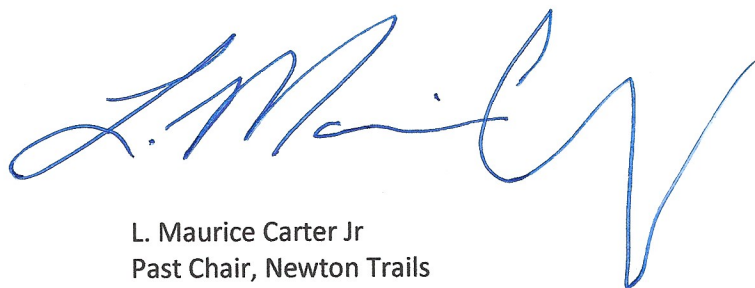
Sara Vinson,

Past Chair, Newton Trails



Florian Pohl

Past Chair, Newton Trails



L. Maurice Carter Jr

Past Chair, Newton Trails