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Railbanking

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Railbanking is an important tool in the preservation of railway corridors for future transportation purposes. This tool was particularly important in the creation of the Kickapoo Rail Trail, which will stretch from Champaign County to Vermilion County, Illinois. Assembling possession of the rail corridor took nearly 20 years to complete. While only the first leg of the trail is now open, it has become an important resource for recreation, commuting and public health. It has resulted in increased commerce for businesses at both ends of the current trail and has become particularly important for small businesses in the community of St. Joseph, IL as cyclists utilize the trail. Working with railroad companies can be incredibly time consuming, predominantly because their main focus is on running a profitable railway, not real estate. They are not often motivated to complete real estate negotiations in a timely manner. Furthermore, the organizations who are negotiating with the railway are typically local governments and not for profit organizations who have an fiduciary responsibility to use their limited taxpayer or philanthropic funding wisely. This also contributes to the lengthy negotiation process.

Rail corridors provide unique, linear, connected pieces of land that would be nearly impossible to assemble today. They have incredible value for future transportation and recreation purposes. Studies overwhelmingly show that access to trails results in improved public health for residents. Beyond their use as trails, these corridors are absolutely critical to preserve for possible reuse as railroad rights of way or other transportation uses in the future. Please reject the proposed rule change which would limit railbanking negotiations. This will only penalize local taxpayers and not-for-profit organizations who work diligently on these projects.