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Subject: Great Redwood Trail, rails to trails

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Message:

Dear STB Commissioners,
As an avid hiker and conservator of our natural resources, I urge you to reconsider the shortsighted move of limiting the timeline to accomplish railbanking agreements. I understand special interests are pushing for that, but you need to be working for all the public's interests, please.

Railbanking has helped to protect thousands of miles of railroad right of way while providing crucial recreational and transportation alternatives to Americans across the country. The Surface Transportation Board's proposal to limit the total available time in which a railbanking agreement can be negotiated to only three years (Docket #EP_749_1) is a short-sighted and counterproductive proposal that will only limit the number of railbanking projects that can be approved over time. The public gains nothing by forcing rail lines to be abandoned when railbanking could be achieved with less restrictive deadlines.

The Surface Transportation Board should instead set a deadline that prevents negotiations from continuing endlessly. A ten-year limit on trail agreement negotiations would allow all the complex layers of agreement and financing that are often part of rail-to-trail agreements to be completed, while still providing parties a real deadline to force final action.

As an advocate for northern California's Great Redwood Trail, I am excited by the opportunities railbanking the old Northwestern Pacific rail line offers our region for non-motorized transportation, recreation, and tourism. While I too would like to see the transition happen quickly, I also understand that such projects require careful planning to succeed, and I do not want an arbitrary timeline hampering our ability to successfully implement railbanking and trail development.

