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May 19, 2024

VIA E-FILING

Cynthia T. Brown
Chief of the Section of Administration
Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington DC 20423-0001

Re: Great Redwood Trail Agency – Adverse Abandonment – Mendocino Railway in Mendocino County, California, AB-1305 (Sub-No. 1)

Dear Ms. Brown:

I am writing in opposition to the Great Redwood Trail Agency's ("GRTA") application to remove Mendocino Railway's federal freight rights ("adverse abandonment"). Preserving MR's rights will protect and drive economic growth in California's rural regions of Fort Bragg and greater Mendocino County.

MR has, through its freight and passenger services, become an economic engine for the rural region. Significantly, MR's Line, which is commonly known in the community as the "Skunk Train," is the top commercial tourist attraction in Mendocino County. MR also facilitates the safe, efficient, and cost-effective multi-modal movement of various commodities moving freight by rail, which is far more efficient than trucking these materials over the region's mountainous and fragile roads.

I have been told by MR that it has received a federal government loan to complete repairs to its line and to fully rehabilitate MR's 40 miles of railroad, including repairing Tunnel #1. This will protect MR's ability to draw tourists and provide freight rail services in this already economically challenged area. It would be tragic for one arm of the government to support repairing and rehabilitating rail infrastructure to then only have another arm of the government grant an adverse abandonment application that could result in the loss of that very same infrastructure.

Denying GRTA's Application is simply good economic policy, as well as good for the environment. Keeping MR active is imperative for economic growth, the reduction of the effects of climate change, meeting anticipated demand, job creation, and supporting resilient supply chains in the region. Granting GRTA's Application would guarantee a diversion from rail to truck, harm the quality of life through increased truck emissions, and increase roadway maintenance costs due to the additional trucks on the roads.

I join MR in strenuously opposing GRTA's Application. I urge the Surface Transportation Board to preserve both the freight and passenger options via the historic Mendocino Railway and not ignore the future economic growth and infrastructure needs in Mendocino County.

Very truly yours,

Jack C. Swearengen, Chair

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