



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT**

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May 11, 2021

Mitch Stogner, Executive Director
North Coast Railroad Authority
419 Talmage Road, Suite M
Ukiah, CA 95482

Subject: Proposed Railbanking of North Coast Railroad Authority's Line from Willits to End of Line in Samoa, Korblex, Korbel, and Carlotta; Surface Transportation Board Docket No. AB 1305

Dear Mr. Stogner:

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors supports preserving the North Coast Railroad Authority's ("NCRA's") railroad right-of-way through railbanking for interim trail use and subject to possible future reconstruction and reactivation of the right-of-way for rail service. NCRA's railroad right-of-way is an immensely valuable public resource and should remain dedicated for current and future transportation needs. The proposed action to file a railbanking application with the Surface Transportation Board is consistent with the land use plans and zoning regulations that apply to Humboldt County's jurisdiction.

We look forward to collaborating with NCRA and the successor agency on planning and implementing trail projects. We understand that the proposed Senate Bill SB-69 would mandate development of a master plan for the Great Redwood Trail. In planning for the Great Redwood Trail within Humboldt County, it will be important to recognize the significant differences in context between the portion of the line from Scotia north to Samoa (the "coastal region") and the portion of the line south of Scotia along the Eel River to the county line near Alderpoint (the "interior region"). We expect that the near-term priority will be to develop trail segments linking cities and communities within the coastal region along Humboldt Bay, the Eel River Valley, and the Mad River. Developing trails within the more remote interior region will likely be a longer-term enterprise that will require significant planning and consultation with adjacent landowners to address geological instability and compatibility with adjacent land use.

Trails should be planned and designed with consideration for community values and priorities and the context of the surrounding landscape and land use. A key planning principle in developing trails and access points is to ensure compatibility with adjacent land use. Security, trespass, fire, drainage, dogs, traffic, parking, and other important issues will need to be addressed. Just because the railroad corridor is railbanked does not mean that trails should be developed along every segment. Suitability for trail development will need to be determined on a segment-by-segment basis. In some locations an alternative alignment for a trail will be preferred over the railroad corridor. In addition, the purpose and design of the trail should fit the context. For example, trails that

connect cities and smaller urban areas will likely be planned to have both transportation and recreational purposes, resulting in paved paths designed in accordance with engineering standards to accommodate bicycles and mobility devices. Trails through natural and undeveloped areas can often be planned for recreational use only, resulting in smaller unpaved paths.

Investment is needed to rehabilitate and maintain the railroad corridor where it is having an adverse impact on adjacent property or public trust resources. NCRA's railroad within Humboldt County has received little maintenance and repair since the 1990s. In many locations, deterioration of the rail prism and railroad infrastructure is increasing flood risks, contributing to drainage problems, creating potential safety and environmental hazards, discharging sediment to waterways, and creating potential nuisance conditions. The railroad along the Humboldt Bay shoreline has become critical coastal protection infrastructure; however, certain areas have suffered significant erosion and deterioration. The Great Redwood Trail represents a critical opportunity to leverage funding that can address these difficult issues while creating trails that provide substantial public benefit.

Please continue to coordinate with Hank Seemann, Public Works Deputy-Director (707-445-7741 or hseemann@co.humboldt.ca.us) on trail-related matters in Humboldt County's jurisdiction.

Sincerely,

Virginia Bass, Chair
County of Humboldt Board of Supervisors