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Bob Holder, President
Steel Valley Trail Council
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October 29, 2018

RE: Docket EP-749-1 - Proposed Rulemaking to Limit NITU's to a Maximum of Six (6) 180-Day Extensions

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

Dear Ms. Brown,

These comments, filed on behalf of the Steel Valley Trail Council are in opposition to a proposed rule by the STB to require that the number of extensions of the trail use negotiation period not exceed six, or essentially three years.

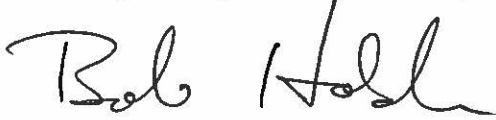
The purpose of railbanking is to preserve our country's railroad corridors and allow for interim trail use. Railbanking has not only transformed thousands of communities across the country by providing safe public spaces for recreation and transportation, it has also preserved thousands of miles of rail corridors that would otherwise have been abandoned. Assembly of these rights-of-way in modern times would be nearly impossible. Railbanking keeps rail corridors intact.

Imposing a 3-year limitation on negotiations would greatly obstruct - and in some cases prevent - railbanking to occur. Of the 393 successfully railbanked corridors, 65 of them took more than 3 years of negotiation between the railroad and the CITU/NITU holder to complete. There are a variety of reasons that negotiations may extend, including: federal and state regulatory processes (environmental assessment, e.g.), the trail manager's ability to secure state or federal funds for acquisition, and appraisal disputes. There is no reason to limit railbanking negotiations. The process of railbanking, including agreement to extend negotiations, is completely voluntary for the railroad. "Reversionary property owners" have available to them means of compensation through this process as well.

Our people spent years negotiating with several railroads, steel mills, municipalities and private property owners in order to cobble together our trail, the Great Allegheny Passage. The GAP Trail now connects Pittsburgh, Pa. to Cumberland, Md. From there, the C&O Canal Towpath continues on to Washington, D.C. The two trails provide a continuous, 335-mile off-road path enjoyed by more than one million people each year. Spending by trailusers from all over the U.S. and the world has revitalized more than a dozen formerly struggling towns between Pittsburgh and Washington.

If the STB were to consider changes related to railbanking negotiations, a suggested improvement would be to change the initial railbanking/interim trail negotiating period to establish a one-year period (instead of 180 days) for any initial and subsequent negotiating periods. From experience in Pennsylvania, negotiations between railroads and Interim Trail Users almost always extend beyond the short 180-day timeframe, creating additional and unnecessary obstacles for both the railroad and the Interim Trail User.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Holder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bob" and last name "Holder" clearly distinguishable.

Bob Holder, President

Steel Valley Trail Council