

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
February 4, 2022
Part of
Public Record

February 4, 2022

By E-Filing

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

Re: Gulf Coast Passenger Service Between New Orleans and Mobile
STB Finance Docket No. 36496

Dear Ms. Brown:

Sitka Forest Products Inc. is located in Montréal, Québec, Canada, and relies on the freight rail service provided by CSX Transportation, Inc. I write on behalf of Sitka Forest Products Inc. to express concerns regarding the impact on that freight rail service of Amtrak's proposed Gulf Coast passenger service between New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama.

Sitka Forest Products Inc. produces wood products and relies on CSXT to transport raw materials to our facility and finished products to our customers. Freight rail service is critical to the success of our business and CSXT provides us access to two major port terminals in New Orleans and Mobile through which we can access greater domestic and international markets than would otherwise be available. The quality of service CSXT provides makes freight rail the most efficient transportation alternative to maintain and grow our business.

CSXT and Norfolk Southern Railway Company have submitted evidence, including a Rail Traffic Controller study, that shows the introduction of Gulf Coast passenger service between New Orleans and Mobile will cause significant harm to freight service. This harm will manifest itself through decreased freight train speeds and delay as well as extreme operational variability. CSXT's local trains, the very trains that directly serve our facility, will be hit the hardest. Sitka Forest Products Inc. is deeply concerned about our ability to meet the demands of our

customers and remain profitable if this harm to CSXT's freight rail service materializes.

Sitka Forest Products Inc. does not oppose Gulf Coast passenger service and expresses no opinion on the merits of that service. However, it is important that the introduction of this passenger service does not decrease the quality of freight service provided by CSXT. It is our understanding that CSXT and NSR have proposed infrastructure projects that would support Amtrak's desired passenger service while protecting the quality of freight service that Sitka Forest Products Inc. relies on. Sitka Forest Products Inc. urges the Board to seriously consider the merits of these projects.

It is unfair for Amtrak to insist on operating passenger service without regard to the businesses it will share the corridor with. If Amtrak is permitted to commence passenger service without paying its own way, the cost of that service will inevitably fall on the shoulders of shippers. Shippers like Sitka Forest Products Inc. will either be forced to turn to more expensive and less efficient alternatives to rail or will wind up subsidizing passenger service through increased rail service costs as CSXT and NSR are pressed to add infrastructure to stem the degradation to freight service.

The Board has an obligation to protect the interests of all parties that rely on the national rail network, not just those of passenger rail. Amtrak's desire for access to the Gulf Coast Corridor with no strings attached is not only harmful to freight rail service, but untenable given the substantial funding it received from Congress last year. Sitka Forest Products Inc. requests that the Board require Amtrak to fund and facilitate the construction of infrastructure projects so as to avoid any harm to freight rail service.

Respectfully submitted,



Michel Vincent
Sitka Forest Products Inc.

cc: FD 36496 Service List