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Dear STB Commissioners,

I truly love traveling by train and would be delighted with passenger service from Eureka to Larkspur. I am an avid hiker as well. My experience with the Eel River watershed makes it absolutely clear that there will never be enough money to restore the railroad. The best use of the right of way at this point is to create a trail in it. A trail would attract tourism and open a beautiful part of Humboldt and Mendocino counties to sensible, low impact use.

As a Coast Guard helicopter pilot in Humboldt County over three tours of duty from 1977 to 1996 I flew along the course of the Eel River numerous times. The areas where the railroad track ran along the river were of particular interest. I observed landslide scars reaching nearly to the ridge tops and into the river and side cast rock and debris from the right of way reaching into the river. These observations convinced me that the likelihood of a restored rail service was nil.

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.

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