



May 5, 2021

North Coast Railroad Authority
Board of Directors
419 Talmage Road, Suite M
Ukiah, CA 95482

Re: Clearing the path for the Great Redwood Trail

Dear Board Members,

On behalf of the City of Ukiah, I am writing to request that you extend your recommendation to the Surface Transportation Board for rail banking of the NCRA corridor to include the section from Willits south to Cloverdale. Despite thorough investigation, we have not seen a realistic business plan that would allow for rail service in this section of the corridor. However, if a plan were to come forward, our request for rail banking from Cloverdale to Willits would not preclude the revival of rail in the future.

The City has experienced for decades now the economic, social, public health, and lost opportunity costs of having an effectively abandoned railway running through our town. The current state of the railway corridor—with the rail infrastructure intact—acts as an impediment to economic development. The California State Parks fact finder website (www.parksforcalifornia.org/communities/) demonstrates how the boundaries of the rail corridor coincide with a strip of poverty, bordered by underutilized properties. And, with the rails in place, maintaining the corridor is problematic and expensive because City crews have to use weed whackers, instead of riding mowers, to control weeds and tall grass. This leads to increased fire risk and the proliferation of homeless encampments hidden by high weeds.

Nevertheless, the City recognizes the vast economic potential of building out the rail corridor as a linear parkway. In fact, Alta Planning has estimated the potential annual recreational, health, and economic benefit at over \$20 million dollars per year. That is why the City, in partnership with trail advocates, has been moving ahead to develop the corridor into a popular community amenity. The City of Ukiah has completed two miles of trail through town thus far. And in April we were awarded funding from the California Natural Resources Agency to extend the trail another two miles south. Moreover, our trail projects have involved countless volunteers and several nonprofits whose participation has enhanced the trail with tree-planting, landscaping, plant maintenance, and the creation of pocket parks and art installations. Their participation is concrete evidence of the high level of community support for the use of the rail corridor for trails and linear parks.

The City of Ukiah has been proactive in maintaining and improving the rail corridor through the center of town. Please support our efforts to put this unique public asset to its highest and best use by recommending rail banking from Cloverdale north.

Regards,

Juan Orozco
Mayor