

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
OFFICE OF PROCEEDINGS

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PUBLIC HEARING
GRENADA RAILWAY, LLC -
RAIL LINE IN GRENADA,
MONTGOMERY, CARROLL,
HOLMES, YAZOO, AND MADISON
COUNTIES, MISSISSIPPI

FD 35247 (Sub-No. 1)

Friday, November 15, 2013

Courtroom
Montgomery County Courthouse
614 Summit Street
Winona, Mississippi

The above-entitled public meeting was
conducted at 9:00 a.m.

BEFORE:

SCOTT M. ZIMMERMAN, ESQ.
STB Office of Proceedings
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

ALSO PRESENT:

JAMIE P. RENNERT, ESQ.

STB Office of Public Assistance,
Governmental Affairs, and Compliance

395 E Street, SW

Washington, DC 20423

202-245-0283

CHRISTOPHER K. DIAMOND, ESQ.

STB Office of Proceedings

395 E Street, SW

Washington, DC 20423

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P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Good morning
3 everyone. I would like to call the meeting to
4 order. Welcome. My name is Scott Zimmerman.
5 I am a branch chief in the Surface
6 Transportation Board's Office of Proceedings.
7 With me here today are two of my colleagues:
8 on my right, Christopher Diamond, one of my
9 colleagues in the Office of Proceedings. And
10 to my left is Jamie Rennert. Jamie is the
11 Deputy Director of the Board's Office of
12 Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and
13 Compliance.

14 We're really glad to be here
15 today, and as I mentioned Jamie's Office, I
16 want to start out by giving a short
17 advertisement for a program that the Board
18 runs out of her Office, known as our Rail
19 Customer and Public Assistance Program. We
20 have some brochures in the back, one of which
21 Jamie is holding up, which describes that
22 program.

1 Basically that program is an
2 opportunity for rail customers, railroads and
3 others affected by rail service to call staff
4 at the Board and informally ask questions or
5 get informal advice about problems or disputes
6 that they may be having regarding rail
7 service. It's a way to help facilitate
8 private-sector solutions to rail problems
9 without having to go through the adversarial
10 processes of the more formal cases that the
11 Board adjudicates.

12 So I would encourage you all to
13 take a brochure if you're interested, and
14 spread the word that the Board offers that
15 program. It's been very effective over the
16 years in helping shippers and railroads come
17 to agreement when disputes arise without
18 having to go to the time and expense of
19 bringing cases for the Board to formally
20 decide.

21 Also, before we begin, I want to
22 thank the courts and the judges here for

1 allowing us the opportunity to use the
2 courtroom today. I also want to thank the
3 staff of the clerk's office and particularly
4 Mr. Talmadge Golding, who is the Chancery
5 clerk here.

6 Mr. Golding has been very helpful
7 and very welcoming to us and was instrumental
8 in facilitating our meeting here today. We
9 had the opportunity to meet with him a bit
10 yesterday, and he regaled us with some stories
11 about the area and the court, and he really
12 made us feel very welcome here. So thank you
13 very much to him and to everybody who made it
14 possible for us to hold this meeting here
15 today.

16 As you know, we're here today to
17 conduct a public meeting led by Board staff in
18 the case, the Board's case docket number FD-
19 35247 (Sub-No. 1). The case is entitled
20 Grenada Railway, LLC - Rail Line in Grenada,
21 Montgomery, Carroll, Holmes, Yazoo and Madison
22 Counties, Mississippi.

1 This case began back in September.
2 It's related to an earlier case, Docket Number
3 FD-35247, in which a petition was filed to
4 revoke the exemption of Grenada Railway to
5 acquire and operate its rail line in
6 Mississippi.

7 The Board denied that petition on
8 September 10, but at the same time, it
9 established this new related subdocket for the
10 purpose of examining the lawfulness of an
11 embargo that Grenada Railway placed on a
12 portion of its line between July of 2011 and
13 July of 2013.

14 The Board decided to, at the same
15 time, announce this public meeting here in
16 Mississippi as a convenient forum for those
17 who might have been affected by that embargo
18 to come and give us their thoughts, give us
19 their comments on that embargo.

20 Before we begin, I also want to
21 make sure to mention that we greatly
22 appreciate and want to thank Senators Wicker

1 and Cochran as well as their staffs, and the
2 entire Mississippi Congressional delegation
3 for their support of this meeting and the
4 Board's work. We appreciate their assistance
5 and are glad that we were able to come down
6 here to provide a forum for those of you who
7 may be affected by the case that is in front
8 of the Board to come and comment to us.

9 So that having been said, the way
10 we are going to proceed with the meeting is
11 that we have got a court reporter here. She
12 is going to create a verbatim transcript of
13 all of the comments here today. Those
14 comments will be reduced to written form.

15 That transcript ultimately will be
16 posted on the Board's website and will become
17 part of the record in FD-35427 (Sub-No. 1),
18 upon which the Board members will make their
19 decision in this case.

20 So unless there's anything that I
21 have forgotten, I think we are ready to
22 proceed. We would like to have the speakers,

1 one at a time, come up to the podium, speak
2 into the mic.

3 And when you come up, if you would
4 please state your name. If you are affiliated
5 with a business or other organization, please
6 identify that organization, and tell us what
7 your relationship to the organization is and
8 give us a business address.

9 And we will just go down the list
10 of speakers, until everybody has had an
11 opportunity to speak. To start out, are there
12 any elected officials or representatives of
13 elected officials who would like to speak
14 first?

15 (No response.)

16 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Otherwise we'll
17 just go down the list. Okay.

18 Chris, Jamie, have I forgotten
19 anything important?

20 MS. RENNERT: You're okay.

21 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Okay. Then our
22 first speaker will be Mr. Robert Riley.

1 MR. RILEY: My name's Robert
2 Riley. I'm the principal petitioner for the
3 original petition there to revoke their
4 operating exemption that in turn made this
5 meeting possible. In relation to the embargo
6 there, the STB considers five criteria in
7 determining whether or not an embargo of a
8 rail line was an unlawful abandonment, the
9 first point being the intent of the rail
10 carrier.

11 As far as that goes there, the
12 Grenada Railway never sought a loan or a grant
13 funds to repair the bridge that made this
14 embargo. And during the lengthy time that the
15 embargo was in effect, even though they sought
16 government funds for the north end, they
17 didn't seek anything for the south end.

18 They made it clear in doing such
19 that they have no intention to use government
20 funding for the south end. So the State of
21 Mississippi was reluctant to give them any
22 money when some money was appropriated. The

1 State was told that the money was only going
2 to be used for the rehabilitation and work on
3 the north end; none was going to be spent on
4 the south end of the railroad.

5 I am not for sure if any money had
6 actually, you know, had ever changed hands
7 there, after that was put up. But obviously
8 the imminent plan there at that point there I
9 think was probably pretty clear; that they
10 were going to abandon the railroad or at least
11 attempt to do so.

12 And in February of -- let's see --
13 of 2011, I believe it was there, they had a
14 rate increase of \$400 for all cars going south
15 out of Grenada, going via the Canton
16 Interchange. As to where it was, you know,
17 \$850 going north, it was \$1,250 to go south.
18 We feel like that that was an idea to run
19 business off or at least discourage use of the
20 south end.

21 And obviously when that didn't
22 work, they had to put something in motion to

1 get the business run off. Well, at the end of
2 the two-year span that there was a promise to
3 operate the railroad, 23 months into that,
4 they send a letter out to everybody saying
5 that they intend to abandon the south end of
6 the railroad.

7 And around that same time, they
8 put an embargo, declaring that there is a
9 supposed bad bridge at West Mississippi. Even
10 still, they could have still serviced the
11 Kosciusko & Southwestern Railway, Burrows
12 Paper and Tri County Coop via the Canton
13 Interchange, by sending a locomotive down
14 here. Now granted, they say it would be
15 prohibitively cost, cost prohibitive. I don't
16 agree with that assessment.

17 Further, when it is all said and
18 done with there, the embargo stayed in for a
19 period of two years, over a bridge that they
20 say needed replacement. With me being a
21 railroad professional there, in a situation
22 such as that, there usually there they would

1 fix a bridge there instead of trying to
2 replace the whole thing.

3 Well, you know, one could argue,
4 and they did argue that that bridge needed to
5 be brought up to 315,000-pound standard for
6 national -- you know, national average there,
7 for bridge. My only question to that is,
8 there's 298 bridges on this entire railroad
9 there, from Memphis to Canton. They are all
10 rated at the exact same weight.

11 Why is it that all of a sudden one
12 bridge at West Mississippi needs to be totally
13 replaced and brought up to a standard of
14 315,000 pounds, when all of the rest of the
15 bridges on this railroad are only rated for
16 286,000 pounds? That makes no sense.

17 Further, Landreth Engineering, one
18 of the people there that they use there went
19 through a long-drawn-out process of, you know,
20 their credentials and everything. Yeah, the
21 guy has got an impressive resume. So do I.
22 I have been a railroad professional now for

1 almost 19 or -- almost 20 years, rather.

2 And I have learned one universal
3 thing on a railroad. When a bridge is tore
4 up, they go out and fix it. When a bridge
5 burns down, they go out and replace it. If a
6 train derails on it and tears it down, they
7 replace it. Otherwise, you just repair it.

8 Well, we put forth the idea there
9 that spans five and six should have been
10 replaced on this bridge there with a cost
11 which is less than \$20,000, which is more than
12 a reasonable amount of money to repair a
13 bridge to make the thing fit for service at
14 286,000 pounds. And they came back with the
15 idea saying that adding wood into a concrete
16 bridge was preposterous.

17 If they would allow us to take you
18 down the railroad there, between Jackson -- or
19 Canton, Mississippi and Memphis, you would see
20 that that very repair that I refer to has been
21 used on several other numerous occasions all
22 up and down this railroad there. So in my

1 opinion, that doesn't hold water.

2 That's just another tactic to make
3 the amount of money that they say it's going
4 to cost to fix it go up and get closer to the
5 idea, Oh, well, it is going to cost too much
6 money. We aren't making that much money, so
7 we have a cause to have this here.

8 I don't buy it. No one else in
9 the state of Mississippi buys it. We all know
10 why they came here. It has been going on
11 since July of 2009.

12 It is no secret that A&K
13 Railroad -- or Materials and all their
14 affiliated companies come in like locusts, buy
15 railroads, do whatever they can to run the
16 business off, smash the place, turn around and
17 jerk the track up, and they go sell the
18 material to some other railroad there for
19 whatever their rehabilitation projects or
20 whatever are.

21 The length of time that the
22 embargo remained into effect, that's another

1 point there under the five criteria. The
2 length of time that the embargo was in effect
3 was two years, which incidently expired July
4 of this year.

5 From July of this year until now,
6 there has been no embargo. So cars leaving
7 out of Resolute Forest Products, there is
8 no -- there's absolutely no reason why those
9 cars shouldn't be routed south, the quicker
10 and faster way to get them to their
11 destination, than sending them through
12 Harrison Yard, Memphis, and adding another 2-,
13 250 miles to the trip time for those cars.

14 The total amount of traffic on
15 this railroad there overall is somewhere in
16 the neighborhood of about 20,000 car loads
17 over the time that they have had this railroad
18 since July of 2009. We have worked it out
19 there that the average there -- and we weren't
20 allowed to look at their monetary figures, but
21 based on other research and stuff that we did
22 on the internet, comparable to merge rates and

1 car hire and whatever that they can charge for
2 their cars and other fees and stuff that
3 associates to make revenue for a railroad,
4 plus the overhead freight to operate the car.
5 And then I am not for sure whether or not --
6 because we weren't allowed to see their sale
7 agreement -- whether they have any initial
8 terminal or final terminal freight that they
9 can get for originating or terminating a car
10 on their railroad.

11 But I suspect, being that that is
12 industry standard, it's very well possible
13 that they could be getting additional revenue
14 from that at this time. You know, if they ran
15 20,000 cars in five years there -- we're
16 sitting there looking at an average there of,
17 you know, 11-, \$1,200 a car -- that's \$20
18 million in five years.

19 If you can't afford to spend
20 \$15,000 to fix a bridge after you have made
21 \$20 million, something is wrong. When they
22 bought this railroad, you know, you would have

1 thought an individual there that was going to
2 spend that kind of money, or at least agree --
3 we hear that they actually bought the railroad
4 on credit, which we weren't allowed to see
5 that, so we can't substantiate that claim.

6 But either if they bought it on
7 credit, or if they bought it outright, we
8 don't know. But one thing is for sure: A
9 whole lot of money there was agreed upon to
10 change hands, or did change hands.

11 I'm a shrewd business person
12 there. It would be real prudent for me to go
13 look at what I am buying beforehand. They
14 knew very well what that bridge looked like.
15 I operated trains over that thing before they
16 ever bought this railroad. And it was in the
17 exact same shape then as it is now.

18 We can ride down Highway 51 at
19 West Mississippi, and this bridge is 50 feet
20 off the road. You can look at it. I mean,
21 it's right there in public view. God and
22 everybody can see it.

1 I mean, we just can't see or
2 fathom why, you know, they would come in and
3 have all of this woe is me, that this bridge
4 is about to fall in or whatever, when it was
5 like that when they got there.

6 The cost of repairs and whatnot to
7 cure that caused the embargo there, you know,
8 to cure the defect of the bridge, I mean, it
9 is inconsequential, you know, compared to what
10 they are making.

11 And then if you really wanted to
12 add to it there, they were real boastful when
13 they first started, that A&K Railroad
14 Materials has this large store of ready
15 material ready to dive into this railroad
16 there and bring it up. And where did it go?
17 We never saw any of it. They didn't care.
18 They just put an embargo out.

19 The financial condition of the
20 rail carrier and their parent company at A&K
21 Railroad Materials, way, way up in the air, a
22 long ways out there. Making plenty of money;

1 financially healthy.

2 That is, you know, the last point;
3 you know, whether or not the rail carrier, or
4 in this case, the rail carrier and the parent
5 company could afford a simple \$15,000 repair
6 to a bridge to keep operating trains. Sure,
7 they could.

8 Other points of it there: The
9 embargo expired in July. They haven't made
10 any attempt to do anything. Well, it's pretty
11 obvious that that right there in itself, if
12 they allowed it to expire without doing any
13 repairs to the bridge, certainly undermines
14 the legitimacy of the embargo in the first
15 place.

16 You know, that's all I have. But
17 I appreciate your time. Thank you.

18 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you, Mr.
19 Riley.

20 Next on the list is Mr. Brian
21 McGurk of Resolute Forest Products.

22 MR. MCGURK: Good morning.

1 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Good morning.

2 MR. MCGURK: My name is Brian
3 McGurk. I'm Director of Logistics for
4 Resolute Forest Products. I am located in
5 Montreal, Canada, and I am accompanied here
6 today with Rob Wise, who is the general
7 manager of our Grenada facility.

8 Resolute Forest Products is
9 pleased to submit this submission to the
10 Surface Transportation Board concerning the
11 embargo of the line operated by Grenada
12 Railway, running from Grenada to Canton,
13 Mississippi, and the effect on the Resolute's
14 operation in Grenada.

15 The Grenada papermill began
16 operation in 1989 as a producer of newsprint
17 for many large newspapers in the southeast
18 United States as well as customers in Mexico
19 and Central America.

20 The original owners of this mill
21 recognized that the region was rich in
22 resources required to run a successful

1 papermill: trees, water, dependable energy,
2 and eager and hardworking workforce, a
3 supportive community, and access to strategic
4 transportation routes.

5 Prior to 2012, the Grenada mill
6 operated under the banner of Abitibi Bowater,
7 and today, under its new name, it is known as
8 Resolute Forest Products.

9 The Grenada mill currently employs
10 169 people, spending \$18 million annually in
11 payroll and benefits. The mill purchases
12 approximately \$31 million in operating
13 supplies and services and \$15.7 million in
14 fiber from local landowners within a 100-mile
15 radius of the operation. The mill also spends
16 nearly \$35 million annually to purchase
17 electricity from TVA.

18 The mill's activities have a total
19 economic impact on the region of over \$100
20 million on an annual basis. Additionally, the
21 Resolute Mill is the largest taxpayer in the
22 Grenada County and is the largest customer of

1 the Grenada Railway.

2 The paper industry is part of the
3 global economy and therefore extremely
4 competitive. Annual newsprint production from
5 the mill exceeds 276,000 short tons, with 52
6 percent of the mill production being shipped
7 via rail; 48 percent is shipped via truck.

8 Of the rail volume, the majority
9 is shipped to customers predominantly in
10 Mexico and, to a lesser extent, the United
11 States. For those customers we ship via rail,
12 truck is not an option, as the cost to ship
13 truck is prohibitive due to the customer's
14 destination, volume shipped to customers,
15 making it operationally infeasible or the
16 simple fact that customers do not have rail
17 sidings to receive rail.

18 As the demand for newsprint in the
19 U.S. steadily declines, the Grenada mill must
20 rely more on key export markets. Mexico in
21 particular seems to be an area of growth and
22 where the Grenada operation has a distinct

1 geographic advantage to serve as long as cost-
2 effective rail service is available to the
3 mill.

4 The Grenada mill's ability to
5 remain a competitive, low-cost producer of
6 newsprint will directly impact the future of
7 its operation.

8 I would like to make the following
9 definitions for purposes of clarification.
10 When I refer to the northern segment, I am
11 referencing the portion of the rail line from
12 Grenada to Memphis, Tennessee. And when I
13 reference the southern segment, I am
14 referencing the portion of the line from
15 Grenada to Canton, Mississippi.

16 Historically, of the total volume
17 of rail shipped from Grenada, approximately 70
18 percent of those shipments went to customers
19 in Mexico, representing just about 1,000 cars
20 annually and shipping via the southern segment
21 over the Canton, Mississippi interchange.
22 Logically, this is the shortest and most

1 direct route for serving the customers, the
2 Mexican customers, the Grenada mills customer
3 base.

4 However, with the advent of a 47-
5 percent rate increase implemented on the 1st
6 of January 2011 and a reduction of service to
7 one day per week, the Grenada mill had to
8 ultimately reroute the traffic over the
9 northern segment into Memphis, Tennessee, this
10 despite a much more circuitous routing to
11 reach our Mexican customers.

12 Currently, shipments by rail to
13 customers in Mexico have grown to just over 75
14 percent of the total mill rail volume.
15 However, the total number of cars shipped has
16 remained constant. This is a consequence of
17 Resolute's shipping newsprint in larger 60-
18 foot rail cars.

19 Recently, however, Resolute has
20 had to stop shipping these 60-foot rail cars,
21 because new weight restrictions on the
22 northern segment prevented the mill from

1 loading these cars to their full capacity,
2 making these cars uneconomical. And I will
3 touch on this topic in a moment.

4 While Resolute recognizes that
5 this hearing is focused on the southern
6 segment, we believe that a brief discussion on
7 the northern segment is also appropriate
8 because of its potential impact on the need of
9 the southern segment.

10 In June of this year, the Grenada
11 Railroad informed Resolute that emergency
12 repairs were required on the Coldwater bridge.
13 This bridge is located some 67 miles north of
14 the Grenada operation. This resulted in a
15 suspension of all rail traffic from the mill
16 for nine days.

17 In August of this year, the
18 Grenada Railroad further notified Resolute
19 that the track weight limit for both rail car
20 and product shipped on the northern segment
21 could not exceed 263,000 pounds because of
22 what the railroad termed bridge issues, this

1 despite the fact that the Grenada Mill had
2 been shipping 60-foot rail cars at 286,000
3 pounds on the northern segment for about a
4 year and a half.

5 As I previously explained,
6 compliance with the 263,000-pound weight limit
7 necessitated Resolute to convert from the use
8 of 60-foot to 50-foot cars, resulting in an
9 approximately 10-percent reduction in payload
10 and a corresponding increase in our per-unit
11 shipment costs.

12 Further, it is Resolute's
13 understanding that there are approximately 130
14 bridges on the northern segment that must be
15 traversed between Grenada and Memphis. In
16 addition to the repairs on the Coldwater
17 bridge, many other bridges are also deemed to
18 be in need of repair.

19 We understand that the cost to
20 repair all the rail bridges on the northern
21 segment may have a total estimated cost in the
22 region of \$10 million. These estimated repair

1 costs of the northern segment and the prospect
2 of a continued embargo or abandonment of the
3 southern segment are of grave concern to
4 Resolute.

5 While current discussions are
6 focused on the southern segment, the northern
7 segment may potentially be in worse condition.
8 The time and cost burden to properly maintain
9 this portion of the line may ultimately
10 prevent the northern segment from being able
11 to handle the traffic in the future.

12 We are especially worried about
13 the prospect of being cut off from rail
14 service entirely if the southern segment is
15 abandoned or the embargo continues and there
16 is no corresponding plan or assurance that the
17 northern segment will receive the necessary
18 repairs to keep it operational in the future.

19 Resolute's Grenada mill must have
20 efficient, cost-effective rail service for the
21 long term that allows us to compete in the
22 markets that we service today and for those

1 markets that we expect to serve in the future.

2 We also need to have a provider of
3 rail service that Resolute and other shippers
4 can work with, not only for the current
5 volumes, but to develop future business that
6 may exist. To this end, Resolute is committed
7 to working with such a partner.

8 We urge the Surface Transportation
9 Board to fully consider under this docket the
10 broader economic considerations to customers;
11 employees, both direct and indirect; local and
12 regional economies in any decision that is
13 rendered.

14 Thank you.

15 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you, Mr.
16 McGurk.

17 Next on the list is Jonathan
18 Kiser.

19 MR. KISER: My name is Jonathan
20 Kiser. I'm a property owner along the
21 railroad in Yazoo County. I'm here today just
22 to say that I am concerned about the current

1 status of the railroad and the corridor and
2 the lack of maintenance on it.

3 My property drains down to the
4 railroad and across through a bridge
5 structure. And as beavers get in and build
6 beaver dams, it causes flooding on my
7 property.

8 If it is not being maintained now within this
9 private property and it gets abandoned and
10 further lack of maintenance, that that will
11 continue to adversely affect my property and
12 my property values. I think there are great
13 benefits to maintaining a transportation
14 corridor, a contiguous corridor north south
15 between Grenada and Canton for Mississippi.

16 I would like to see this corridor
17 preserved in either private ownership or in
18 public ownership as a transportation corridor
19 to serve the people of Mississippi. I think
20 the loss of it would be detrimental to
21 transportation. As gas prices fluctuate
22 greatly, having alternative modes of

1 transportation is in the public's best
2 interest.

3 I'm also concerned with the intent
4 of this rail company, as they have the same
5 parent company with the Natchez Railroad LLC
6 that recently put notifications on all the
7 private rail crossings in Franklin County that
8 notified property owners that their crossings
9 would be closed unless they contacted a phone
10 number.

11 When they contacted a phone
12 number, they were sent by registered mail an
13 application that required a \$1,500 application
14 fee to have their private crossing considered
15 to be maintained or it would be removed, and
16 a removal date stated of April of this year.

17 I'm concerned that this same
18 parent company is going to employ those same
19 tactics along this rail line and adversely
20 affect the property owners with what could be
21 annual fees of application fees that are
22 somewhat unjustified in my opinion, that I

1 don't understand the basis for how they would
2 justify that high of an application fee to
3 maintain a private crossing to land that
4 you've had access to prior to their possession
5 of the rail.

6 So as I said, as a property owner,
7 I'm concerned about the lack of maintenance,
8 the lack of value to my property from the
9 flooding, the expense that I have to incur to
10 keep my property from flooding, and the
11 potential exploitation by these application
12 fees that they have employed in other areas to
13 maintain a private crossing.

14 Thank you.

15 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you very
16 much.

17 Next we would like to call on Sue
18 Stidham.

19 MS. STIDHAM: Good morning and
20 welcome to Winona. I am Sue Stidham. I'm a
21 member of the North Mississippi Railroad
22 Authority and also a team member for Economic

1 Development for Montgomery County and even
2 from the surrounding counties.

3 Since the embargo and closing of
4 the south segment of the Grenada Railroad LLC,
5 our economy has declined, with double-digit
6 unemployment, cuts in production, all the way
7 to some of our industry closing and have not
8 reopened. Some of our businesses closed due
9 to the lack of money to spend in their stores.

10 These closings and jobs lost has
11 also affected our population. We have seen
12 our population decline, due to the fact they
13 had to go to elsewhere to get jobs. Therefore
14 our tax revenue is also less than what it used
15 to be.

16 We understand that the nation's
17 economy has been a sluggish economy. Well, I
18 can assure you that the economy along this
19 closed rail line has been even greater as far
20 as being sluggish and slow to grow, sometimes
21 no growth at all.

22 Also, since the closing of the

1 southern segment, there has been a decline of
2 new prospects to our area. One of the
3 questions that is being asked today is do you
4 offer rail? Well, the answer to that is no,
5 right now we do not.

6 Well, industry today wants rail in
7 place because they need it. But they also
8 want rail in place for any future development
9 and growth. And that's a must to have today,
10 especially when it comes to recruiting. The
11 growth of our local economy, and really the
12 state's and even the whole country's economy
13 cannot afford to lose existing rail.

14 And we must work to promote, to
15 put and lay new rail. Mississippi is
16 strategically located between two of the
17 greatest waterways that you can find, one on
18 the east and one on the west and also the Gulf
19 to the south. And we have to have a way to
20 get our products to market that's safe and
21 affordable.

22 And for us to do that today, for

1 us, even to offer the possibility of being
2 able to get goods to market, whether today we
3 are seeing a higher cost through gasoline,
4 higher costs in operating trucks, and if we
5 have the option to ship it by rail to the
6 waterways, then our goods and products can
7 meet their destination.

8 Today one of our largest crops in
9 this area is a crop that people depend on for
10 extra income, and in some cases, they depend
11 on it for their living. They may drive a log
12 truck. It's almost non-existent, because
13 there is not a market.

14 And even if there were a market,
15 we would have difficulty getting it, shipping
16 it, because we do not have rail. This
17 embargo has certainly put a heavy burden on
18 just not the business owners but the whole --
19 all the citizens in this area.

20 And all we ask today as you make
21 your decisions, that they are made to give us
22 a favorable result in keeping this rail line

1 open. And I mean open from the Tennessee
2 state Mississippi lines to the connecting
3 point in Canton, Mississippi.

4 I want to thank you. I want to
5 thank you today for coming here and taking
6 time and interest to help us solve this.
7 Thank you.

8 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you very
9 much.

10 Next we would like to invite Glenn
11 Smith to come up.

12 MR. SMITH: That's Glenn Smith, G-
13 L-E-N-N, Smith, Director of the Chamber of
14 Commerce, Grenada, Mississippi, 95 Southwest
15 Frontage Road, Grenada, 38901.

16 I would like to thank Robert Riley
17 and Brian McGurk for their informing this
18 committee of the facts to keep the railroad
19 moving forward. As a director of the Chamber
20 of Commerce, the rail lines are incredibly
21 important to the industry -- present and
22 future industry growth of the City of Grenada.

1 I agree with Sue Stidham that the
2 job loss now and in the future would be not in
3 the best interests of the City of Grenada,
4 which is in the central part of the north
5 section of the State of Mississippi. We would
6 like to continue the rail system to be open
7 for the industries of Grenada.

8 Thank you very much for your time.

9 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you very
10 much, Mr. Smith.

11 The last speaker that we have
12 signed up to speak today is Mr. Pablo Diaz.

13 MR. DIAZ: Good morning. Thank
14 you for the opportunity. First I would like
15 to enter into the record a letter from
16 Representative Tommy Reynolds. He is a State
17 Representative and he wanted to be here today,
18 but he couldn't attend. Last night we
19 received an email where he has to place this
20 into the record, and it is okay to read it for
21 the record, and it says:

22 "Honorable Members of the Surface

1 Transportation Board:

2 "Thank you for the opportunity to
3 offer commentary about the issue of the
4 potential closure of portions of the Grenada
5 Railway. I support all efforts to continue
6 the full utilization of the rail for its
7 intended purpose -- to transport products
8 through the region in a cost effective timely
9 manner for our local businesses.

10 "I oppose any actions which would
11 result in abandonment, closure or repurposing
12 of any part of the Grenada Railway. It would
13 be a tremendous tragedy to lose this great
14 resource which has provided and will continue
15 to provide economic stability to our rural
16 areas. Our local businesses need this service
17 to survive.

18 "Any economist will acknowledge
19 that rail is a vital artery of commerce, and
20 the closure of an accessible rail line will
21 cripple any future economic development of the
22 area.

1 "I stand ready to help in any
2 effort to retain the Grenada Railway service
3 along its full route.

4 "Your kind consideration of my
5 concerns is greatly appreciated.

6 "Very truly yours,

7 "Thomas U. Reynolds, Mississippi
8 State Representative District 33."

9 Now, I'm here in representation of
10 the economic development interests of Grenada
11 County. I'm the Director of Economic
12 Development of the Grenada County Economic
13 Development District. And I want to thank you
14 for the opportunity and for being here today
15 with us.

16 And as an economic development
17 representative for Grenada County, I work
18 together with my counterpart in surrounding
19 counties to develop economic development
20 policies that support regional economic
21 development goals for the benefits of the
22 citizens in our region.

1 In the last 20 years rural areas
2 in the country have suffered as more and more
3 people actually move out of the rural areas
4 into metropolitan areas. And even though
5 there is not enough time today to discuss all
6 of the reasons and factors affecting such a
7 trend, it is important to keep in mind that
8 availability of jobs is actually an essential
9 part of the decision-making process: am I
10 going to stay in a rural area, or am I going
11 to move to a metropolitan area?

12 So Mississippi is largely rural,
13 and our region in north Mississippi is no
14 different. And to create jobs in an ever
15 changing environment that becomes ever more
16 technologically dependent, transportation
17 infrastructure has become a minimum
18 requirement to be able to just get to the
19 table and compete.

20 The issues related to rail service
21 in the region in the last four years have had
22 a negative effect on local and regional

1 efforts to attract new companies to our
2 communities.

3 When communities like Winona,
4 Vaiden, and Grenada have to compete for the
5 same jobs against large metropolitan areas in
6 the southeast or elsewhere, we have to come to
7 the table as a region, not as a locality or a
8 municipality.

9 When we come to that table to
10 compete for those economic development
11 projects, transportation infrastructure is
12 key, is a component that we have to offer.
13 And we are analyzed on a regional level. It
14 is not on a county level; it's a multi-county
15 level as a region, that we are being compared
16 to other metropolitan areas or larger
17 communities.

18 The threat, real or perceived, of
19 abandonment of the south or the north part of
20 the Grenada Railway line has been a huge
21 deterrent to potential investors to our region
22 over the last four years.

1 This is to say that rail service
2 is key, important, and that our communities
3 throughout this whole region in North Central
4 Mississippi will continue to do anything
5 possible to keep the rail service available.

6 We hope the Surface Transportation
7 Board will keep that in mind and look at the
8 big picture as you continue to look at this
9 case and make decisions about it.

10 There are hundreds of jobs in
11 Grenada County that depend on reliable,
12 efficient and fairly priced rail service.
13 Some of the companies that currently use the
14 rail in my county will not be able to stay in
15 business without it; at least, not in my
16 region, not in my community.

17 As a community, we are very, very
18 worried about the ability -- our ability to
19 keep long-term rail service in the region to
20 support the growth of existing companies, and
21 the recruiting of new companies.

22 To close, on behalf of the

1 community of Grenada, I would like to thank
2 you for being here today.

3 Please seek all the facts and data necessary
4 to provide a fair ruling on the issue at hand.

5 And I encourage you to not look at
6 any part of this case as an isolated piece.

7 The rail line at stake runs from south of
8 Memphis, Tennessee, to Canton, Mississippi.

9 Given the different procedures and
10 filings that have occurred since 2009 on this
11 issue, we tend to forget that this is one rail
12 line, not two rail lines. I encourage the
13 Surface Transportation Board to keep that in
14 mind and to think of all of our communities as
15 one united region that is fighting to create
16 jobs and secure a future for the next
17 generation of North Central Mississippians.

18 Thank you.

19 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you very
20 much, Mr. Diaz.

21 Is there anyone else who has not
22 put their name on the list but would like to

1 speak this morning?

2 MR. RUSSELL: Good morning. I'm
3 Steve Russell, Executive Director of North
4 Central Planning and Developing District,
5 which is located here Winona. We represent
6 seven counties in North Central Mississippi.
7 One of those counties is Yalobusha, which is
8 on the northern end of this, the northern
9 stretch of the railway. The other six are
10 Grenada and south of Grenada County are all
11 affected by this. The rail runs through six
12 of those seven counties; the rail line runs
13 through six of those.

14 Just echoing what other people
15 have said, we -- on behalf of our region which
16 is very rural, I would like to point out that
17 the rail service is essential to economic
18 development for our area. We work very
19 closely with these seven counties.

20 I have seen numerous times where
21 industries have passed over our area because
22 of lack of rail service in the southern part

1 of this railway. Some people have cited some
2 statistics or data about particular
3 industries, one of which, in Grenada, the
4 Bowater plant, which depends heavily on rail
5 service.

6 We have seen a decline in business
7 and industry on the southern half of this rail
8 line due to the lack of adequate rail service.
9 This is -- there are ten planning and
10 development districts in the state. We are
11 the most rural. We have the smallest
12 population of those ten, the most rural
13 population.

14 So we are kind of competing with
15 some other areas that are already a little bit
16 ahead of us sometimes, in terms of economic
17 development. So I think even more
18 importantly, this rail service is vital for
19 our region, more so maybe than some other
20 parts of the country.

21 So I would just like to urge the
22 Board to please seriously consider maintenance

1 of this, leaving this rail line open, the rail
2 way -- the entire rail way from the southern,
3 the northern half down to Canton. As I said,
4 this does affect -- both ends of the rail way
5 affect our district, and we are vitally
6 interested in keeping this open.

7 So I just wanted to come before
8 you today and, on behalf of our seven counties
9 in this part of the state, urge you to please
10 seriously consider maintenance and
11 continued -- renewed operation of the rail
12 way.

13 Thank you very much.

14 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you. If you
15 wouldn't mind, if you could come up and just
16 so we have your name and address in writing,
17 could you just sign in on the sheet.

18 Is there anyone else who would
19 like to speak?

20 Come on forward.

21 MR. DINKANE: Good morning.

22 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Good morning.

1 MR. DINKANE: My name is Ehalid
2 Dinkane. I represent the community. I was
3 not aware of the embargo, and nor do I
4 understand the logistics, but ever since I was
5 seven years old -- I am now 72 -- this
6 railroad has been a part of our community.

7 Mr. Riley said it pretty simply
8 earlier. He said God could see the need of
9 the goodness or the stability of the bridge.
10 And when he said that, God was the only reason
11 I came this morning. Because definitely I
12 would not like to see this railroad removed
13 from our community. It has been a part of
14 this community ever since I have been here.

15 I think all of us that's in this
16 community, we are concerned about long term
17 planning and survival needs. It's a
18 motivation to keep our railroad intact. Those
19 of us that are looking at global warming and
20 realizing that eventually we have to get out
21 of our cars and reduce that transportation.

22 We are going to need a mass

1 transit system that will make transportation
2 possible. To lose this railroad would be
3 adverse to that.

4 So whoever has the power to keep
5 our railroads -- keep this railroad from
6 Memphis to Canton in place, I plead and I pray
7 that you will make the correct decision to
8 help us maintain this system, because I think
9 it is a critical part of our community.

10 Thank you.

11 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you, sir.
12 Would you mind coming up and just signing in,
13 so we have your name and address?

14 (Pause.)

15 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Is there anyone
16 else who would like to come up?

17 MR. COOPER: Good morning.

18 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Good morning.

19 MR. COOPER: We are very thankful
20 to have you all here today. My name is Greg
21 Cooper and I am with the Kosciusko Attala
22 Development Authority in Kosciusko and Attala

1 County. We connect our rail line -- we have
2 a rail spur that connects in Holmes County and
3 in Durant.

4 And I just want to reiterate that
5 the rail is very vital in economic development
6 in these days. We have seen projects come to
7 our community, and we have lost them too,
8 because of no rail.

9 And so I am just here to reiterate
10 to you guys -- and as a community, we once had
11 a rail that ran from Durant all the way to
12 Ackerman. It has been portionally taken up.
13 And as a community that has seen that, I want
14 to just really stress to you all, I think that
15 this portion should not be taken away going
16 south into Canton.

17 We do thank you all for being
18 here. And thank you for your time.

19 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you very
20 much. Would you mind coming up and signing
21 just so we have your name and address?

22 MR. COOPER: Yes, sir. No

1 problem. We do thank you.

2 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Is there anyone
3 else who would like to comment?

4 (No response.)

5 MR. ZIMMERMAN: All right. Well
6 again, we greatly appreciate the hospitality
7 of the folks here in Winona. We are glad to
8 come down. And we appreciate all the speakers
9 here today.

10 We understand that some of you may
11 have come from some distance away, so again,
12 thank you very much. And with that, the
13 meeting is closed.

14 (Whereupon, at 9:55 a.m., the
15 public hearing was concluded.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the foregoing transcript

In the matter of: Public Hearing RE Grenada Railway

Before: Surface Transportation Board

Date: 11-15-13

Place: Winona, Mississippi

was duly recorded and accurately transcribed under
my direction; further, that said transcript is a
true and accurate record of the proceedings.



Court Reporter

NEAL R. GROSS

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:

Judiciary A, Vice Chairman
 Completion, Revision and
 Publication
 Constitution
 County Affairs
 Ways and Means

November 14, 2013

Honorable members of the Surface Transportation Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer commentary about the issue of the potential closure of portions of the Grenada Railway.

I support all efforts to continue the full utilization of the rail for its intended purpose – to transport products through the region in a cost-effective, timely manner for our local businesses.

I oppose any actions which would result in abandonment, closure or repurposing of any part of the Grenada Railway. It would be a tremendous tragedy to lose this great resource, which has provided, and will continue to provide, economic stability to our rural areas. Our local businesses need this service to survive.

Any economist will acknowledge that rail is a vital artery of commerce, and the closure of an accessible rail line will cripple any future economic development of the area.

I stand ready to help in any effort to retain the Grenada Railway service along its full route.

Your kind consideration of my concerns is greatly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Thomas U. Reynolds
 Mississippi State Representative, District 33