

Upstate Forever

Promoting Sensible Growth and
Protecting Special Places in the Upstate

233217

October 16, 2012

Ms. Cynthia Brown
Chief of the Section of Administration
Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E. Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

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Mr. Joshua Wayland
Surface Transportation Board
Case Control Unit
Washington, DC 20423

Re: Pickens Railway Company – Abandonment Exemption – Pickens County, S.C., AB 1097X

Dear Mr. Wayland,

Upstate Forever is a non-profit, membership-based organization whose mission is to promote sensible growth and protect special places across the Upstate of South Carolina. We have nearly 2,000 members, 17 staff, and two offices. We are writing to you in reference to Docket No. AB 1097X regarding the 8.5-mile rail line currently owned by Pickens Railway Company that runs from Easley, SC to Pickens, SC.

Our understanding is that the Cities of Easley and Pickens have jointly filed for a request for Public Use Condition and Interim Trail Use, as well as a Statement of Willingness to Assume Financial Responsibility. We have reviewed the Environmental Analysis (EA) related to this project, which invited the comments we now submit. We support the cities in their request and encourage the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to help facilitate the conversion of this rail line to a public use trail. Joining us in our comments is the YMCA of Pickens County whose focus is to positively impact lives for youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility, and the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce.

Upstate Forever advocates for active living and transportation policies, projects, and programs that positively impact local economies and improve public health and quality of life for citizens. We played a pivotal role in the creation of the Greenville Hospital System (GHS) Swamp Rabbit Trail, a shared use path in Greenville County that has spurred economic development in the cities of Greenville and Travelers Rest, as well as Greenville County. A study conducted by Furman University found that local businesses nearby the trail have seen revenue increases ranging from 30 to 85 percent since the trail's construction. Three small businesses have located near the trail due to the anticipated beneficial economic impacts. The GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail has also had a major impact on the quality of life for Upstate residents. The study found that between July 2010 and June 2011, there were approximately 359,000 trail users, 80 percent of which were cyclists. Additionally, it was found that 6% of trail users were utilizing the trail for transportation purposes, reducing automobile trips and harmful emissions and improving air quality.

The YMCA of Pickens County Board of Directors has offered its full support and desire to see a pedestrian trail come to fruition. A survey was conducted of the members of the Pickens County

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YMCA as well as past program participants on their opinions of a potential trail. Of the 514 respondents, 97% responded that they desire a trail (with only 16 opposing a trail). Healthy living is one of the three focus areas of the YMCA and this trail provides an opportunity for people to become active. While it is the personal responsibility for people to become active, it is the responsibility of the community as a whole to provide venues and opportunities for people to become active.

The Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce submitted an Opinion Editorial on August 16, 2012 that stated, "90 percent of our membership supports city and county leaders working together to purchase the property for the sole purpose of developing a hiking/biking trail." The Op Ed cited the many benefits the Swamp Rabbit Trail has brought to the neighboring county of Greenville, SC as well as a recent study of the potential impacts the proposed Ecusta Trail in neighboring North Carolina could have for Henderson and Transylvania Counties. For example, the study suggested that the construction of the Ecusta Trail will create 180 jobs resulting in a \$20 million impact to the local area; increase property values by \$22 million; and attract more than 20,000 new visitors.

The opportunity that now stands before us in Pickens County to convert the 8.5-mile rail line running from Easley to Pickens to a public use trail is one that cannot be missed. The potential economic, health, and quality of life impacts for the residents of Easley, Pickens, and all of Pickens County are just too great. In closing, on behalf of Upstate Forever, our 2,000 members, and the Upstate communities we represent, and in partnership with the YMCA, we strongly urge you to do whatever is necessary to ensure that the request of the Cities of Easley and Pickens to convert this rail line to a public use trail is granted.

I certify service by U.S. Mail, postage pre-paid, first class on the date of this letter to the representative of Pickens Railway Company as set forth below.

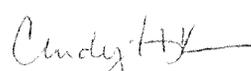
Sincerely,



Lisa Hallo
Upstate Forever
Program Director



Sid Collins
CEO
Pickens YMCA



Cindy Hopkins
Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce
President

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