

**Testimony to Surface Transportation Board
December 4, 2008
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My name is Katie Sonnenborn, and I am here on behalf of Dia Art Foundation. Thank you for hearing my statement.

Dia was founded in 1974 to support the work of exceptional artists. Based in New York City, Dia is a national organization with international acclaim. Our renowned collection of artworks from the 1960s and '70s to the present is housed at the Dia:Beacon museum in New York's Hudson Valley. It is the country's largest center for contemporary art. Additionally, we present art projects in New York City, and maintain several large-scale, permanent projects including two monumental artworks sited directly in the landscape in New Mexico and Utah.

Today I will address an issue of National Cultural Patrimony: the profound negative impacts that the Caliente Rail Corridor would have on artist Michael Heizer's *City*, a singular and irreplaceable American artwork which Dia supports. If built as proposed, construction and operation of this rail will irrevocably violate one of the most important artworks of our time, and render a devastating blow to the future of America's cultural history.

Heizer is among the great artists alive today. His artwork is included in collections around the world, but he is most well-known for the one project that cannot exist within museum walls: the Nevada sculpture complex *City*. Spanning over one mile long and 500 feet wide, *City* comprises a series of abstract forms made of earth, rock, and concrete. It is also the culmination of the pioneering and uniquely American qualities of Heizer's artwork: architectural scale, and the use of industrial materials and construction techniques.

Moreover, *City* synthesizes Heizer's artistic vocabulary within a transcendent and timeless setting – Garden Valley – which is a majestic example of Nevada's basin and range topography. This confluence of natural and manmade beauty is rare, and it is in grave peril if the Caliente Corridor proceeds as planned. The noise; traffic; intrusion of noxious weeds; and visual disruption will irreparably intrude on visitor's experience of the site which Heizer's selected for its grandeur and isolation. He sought to create a powerful masterpiece for the United States in the spirit of the ancient monuments of Egypt, Peru, Mexico, and Bolivia. Garden Valley conveyed a sense of timelessness, and today *City* is imbued with these characteristics.

Despite these ancient roots, Heizer's monumental project is also uniquely local and modern. *City* is being built by residents of the region using contemporary construction techniques and materials procured at the site. Additionally, the project has provided significant local economic benefit to Lincoln and Nye Counties. Over \$23 million in private funding has been funneled into these counties for construction of *City*. Equally important, philanthropists are committed to future expenditures of private resources to maintain the sculpture and to provide public access. It is without doubt that when

complete, *City* will create economic benefit for the rural area by drawing national and international visitors.

As evidence, *City* is internationally renowned even in its unfinished state. It graced the cover of *Art in America* magazine in 1976 and has since been known as an icon of post-war art. When the *Caliente Corridor* was proposed, art experts across the county expressed shock and dismay at the prospect of losing a monument of American art and its contributions to world culture. Additionally, *The New York Times* profiled the issue on the cover of its national Sunday magazine.

Together with Dia, opposition to the *Caliente Corridor* has been voiced by some of today's most preeminent cultural leaders, among them: Michael Govan, Director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Glenn Lowry, Director of New York's Museum of Modern Art; Kathy Halbreich, former Director of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Josef Helfenstein, Director of the Menil Collection, Houston; and James Wood, President and CEO of the Getty Trust in Los Angeles. Each publicly testified to the enormous cultural significance of *City*, and the fundamental responsibility to protect it as a national treasure.

Echoing their support was a unanimous resolution passed by the Association of Art Museum Directors towards the long-term protection of *City*. Representing 148 directors from 39 States, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico, the AAMD's resolution predicted "a great cultural loss for the nation" if the *Caliente Corridor* were to proceed as planned. The College Art Association published a similar declaration.

Dia has regularly submitted comments expressing our points of contention against the *Caliente Corridor*, most recently to the STB on July 15, 2008. Nevertheless, DOE has not made any significant effort to engage Dia or the expert community that has testified to the unequivocal cultural importance of *City*. Nor has the agency assessed the potential cultural and economic benefits of preserving *City*. As we have previously stated, Dia welcomes the opportunity to participate in any such analysis.

Today, however, I want to firmly reiterate our opposition to the rail line as currently planned, and to represent for the STB the sincere concern held by many American's about the proposed route. We request that the *Caliente Corridor*, and any alternative rail line traversing Garden Valley, be re-routed to protect this major cultural contribution.

Thank you.