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Testimony Submitted to the Federal Transportation Board

July 1, 2009

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Earl Blumenauer".

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding the National Trails System Act Amendment of 1983 and the railbanking law. I appreciate the opportunity to comment and am glad that the Board is giving attention to this important issue. I will focus my remarks on one of the important products of the railbanking policy: rails-trails and their impact on the environment and the communities they exist in.

The National Trails System Act Amendment of 1983, in conjunction with numerous decisions by the Surface Transportation Board, has created over 5,079 miles of "banked" rail lines, preserving them for future use as railways, community trails or multimodal corridors.¹ Although these lines are not currently needed as part of our rail system, preserving them in case of need is a worthwhile project. America's transportation needs have fluctuated frequently over the past century and protecting the infrastructure we have already invested in should be a priority, especially when doing so is comparatively inexpensive. Railbanking lets the government protect an investment it has already made- the right of way for our railroad system.

¹ Rails to Trails Conservation, comp. Railbanking History. Rep. Mar. 2005. Rails to Trails. June 2009 <www.railstotrails.org>.

As these rail systems are already cleared, relatively flat and well graded, they can easily be converted to community rails-trails and used by the community. Since the 1983 Amendment, over 2,500 miles of the rail lines have been turned into rails-trails, resulting in community trails in all fifty states.² Rails-trails play an important role in the community—serving as a multi modal transportation option for pedestrians, bicyclists, skateboarders and other non-motorized users, as well as providing space for recreational exercise for families and individuals. With American drivers wasting an average of thirty-eight hours per year in traffic, rails to trails projects serve as a viable transportation alternative. Since these paths follow old railway lines, they often link urban areas to each other and simultaneously provide transportation options for commuters who live both in and out of urban centers. Fifty-two percent of Americans support increasing infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians, and funding programs that give them more commuting choices. Railbanking is a low-cost way for us to support bike and pedestrian trails without high-cost projects, land acquisition programs or extensive planning operations.

While rails-trails help improve our environment and our quality of life, they also help improve our nation's health. Over 60% of adult Americans, and one third of our children, are overweight. The average length of a railbanked trail is approximately twenty-three miles long- that is more than long enough to provide adults and children with the 30-60 minutes worth of exercise recommended by the USDA's dietary guidelines.³ A study done by the University of North Carolina in 2006 suggests that individuals living near a trail are significantly more likely to

² Ferster, Andrea C. "Rails to Trails Conversation: a Legal Analysis." American Planning Association 58 (2006): 3-10.

³ Rails to Trails Conservation, comp. Railbanking History. Rep. Mar. 2005. Rails to Trails. June 2009 <www.railstotrails.org>.

exercise than those who do not have access to such trails. Rail-trails provide children and families with a safe, traffic free, inviting place to be active.

Because of the increase in outdoor activity that is associated with rails-trails, they have a positive impact on the communities in which they're located. Throughout my years in Congress I have advocated for policies that encourage livable communities- communities where families and individuals are safe, healthy and economically secure, and where they have relationships with the people around them. Rails-trails play an important role in making communities more livable; they have been shown to encourage economic development through increased tourism and property values, encourage healthier lifestyles and transportation choices, and promote interaction between community members. As President Obama has commented, "Building more livable and sustainable communities will not only reduce the amount of time individuals spend commuting, but will also have significant benefits to air quality, public health and reducing greenhouse gas emissions." This Administration is strongly supportive of livable communities and the role that our transportation choices play in community development-- rails-trails are one example of the many ways that the federal government can continue to promote this policy.

Again, I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the opportunity to express my support for the railbanking policy and the subsequent opportunities it creates. Thank you.