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January 26, 2006

Secretary  
Surface Transportation Board  
Washington, DC 20423

ENTERED  
Office of Proceedings

FEB - 2 2006

Part of  
Public Record

Re: **Petition for a Declaratory Order  
STB Finance Docket 34818**



Dear Secretary:

Please accept this letter of support for a Petition for a Declaratory Order filed on behalf of the City of Jersey City, Rails to Trails Conservancy, the Embankment Preservation Coalition, and NJ State Assemblyman Louis Manzo regarding the Harsimus Branch rail line. Please include this letter as part of the record of the proceeding. I have served representatives of the parties by US mail (see cc: list below).

Hudson County has traditionally been a major transportation hub, and by the late 19th century railroads dominated much of the landscape and covered the waterfront. The Pennsylvania Railroad main passenger line and main freight line, the subject of this petition, drove through the Downtown to the Hudson River Waterfront. The passenger line terminated at what was once the largest passenger terminal in the world, at Exchange Place. A half-mile north, the Harsimus Branch freight line entered the Harsimus Yards and Docks, where freight from the Midwest continued its journey into Manhattan and points beyond.

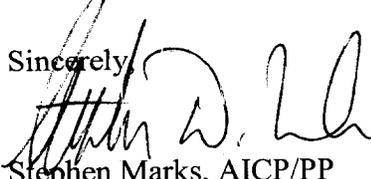
The Harsimus Branch freight line was heavily used until the mid-20th century and was in service at least into the 1980s. It has been studied for future uses including open space, greenway, and light rail. Recently, the corridor was identified in a route study commissioned by the New Jersey Department of Transportation as a link in the proposed and partially built East Coast Greenway, a 2600-mile bicycling and pedestrian trail from Maine to Florida. The County of Hudson endorsed this route, along with dozens of municipalities in New Jersey.

The Hudson County Master Plan supports preservation of important historic resources on the State and/or National Registers of Historic Places, including the Harsimus Branch Embankment. In addition, the Hudson County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Plan seeks to double

the inventory of open space within the county over the next 10 years and places a special emphasis on greenways and public access to the waterfront, both of which are potential benefits of the Harsimus Branch. The Hudson County Open Space Trust Fund Advisory Board highly ranked the Harsimus Branch Embankment property for acquisition funding, and awaits the results of this petition before the Surface Transportation Board.

The Harsimus Branch transportation corridor has existed for 150 years and has the potential of providing continuing transportation use as well as open space in our densely populated county. It should not be lost to development. The apparent failure to comply with federal abandonment regulations has deprived the public of important protections. The Surface Transportation Board should initiate a proceeding, or order Conrail to comply with 49 USC 10903 by seeking an abandonment authorization.

Sincerely,



Stephen Marks, AICP/PP  
Division Chief

cc: Jonathan Broder, VP and GC  
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