

# MENDOCINO RAILWAY

Foot of Laurel Street  
Fort Bragg, California 95437

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April 6, 2024

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors  
501 Low Gap Road  
Ukiah, California 95482

Members of the Board:

I wanted to call your attention to two very critical matter facing the future of Mendocino County's transportation network.

The first concerns the North Coast Rail Authority (NCRA), a group that even Senator McGuire labeled as "the center of controversy on the North Coast [for the past 30 years]," and that has wasted more than \$141M of taxpayer money. The NCRA has now been rebranded as the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA), but this name change hasn't ended any of the controversy. Because while the GRTA plans to leave the NWP's tracks in place south of the Mendocino County border—so the people and businesses south of that border can benefit from both rails and trails, the GRTA has decided to deny those benefits to the people and businesses of Mendocino County. So, even though there is room for both rails and trails in Mendocino County too, the GRTA has chosen to forevermore cut Mendocino County off from our country's national railroad network. Even more bizarrely, not only do some of Mendocino County's political leadership seem okay with that, some are even helping the GRTA accomplish their goal. Isn't it time for Mendocino County to stop being a doormat, to stand up and demand the same benefits for its people and businesses that the people and businesses of Sonoma and Marin will enjoy?

Table 1. Summary of Public Investment in NCRA Rail Corridor

Purpose	Amount
Right-of-Way and Equipment Acquisition	\$44,800,000
Rail Rehab/Capital Projects	\$48,744,364
Project & Environmental Studies	\$12,677,000
Debt, Admin, Local Match	\$17,310,550
SB 1029 Assessment & Dissolution	\$17,800,000
<b>TOTAL PUBLIC INVESTMENT</b>	<b>\$141,331,914</b>

Second, in order to more easily achieve its plan to cut Mendocino County off from our national railroad network, the GRTA has announced that it intends to force the abandonment of Mendocino Railway's California Western Railroad / Skunk Train. If they succeed, they will have killed a railroad that has served, and bound together, the communities of Willits and Fort Bragg for 139 years; a railroad that even today has customers interested in shipping 400-500 railcars of freight between our two cities, shipments that would remove nearly 2,000 trucks from Highway 20 each year. And this is just one example of the railroad freight opportunities that the NCRA (and now the GRTA) has negligently – or intentionally – prevented for more than two decades now. The NCRA and GRTA have insisted that freight rail won't work in Mendocino County not because there isn't demand for it, but solely because they have been too incompetent to carry it out and too jealous of their fiefdom to allow anyone else to do so.

Freight trains move millions of tons of goods and materials across our national railroad network every day, reducing road congestion, improving road safety, and avoiding the greenhouse gas and other pollution produced by trucks. Trains can move one ton of freight nearly 500 miles on just 1 gallon of fuel; not even a Prius achieves that efficiency. Our State Legislature and Governor have mandated that California must by 2030 reduce its GHG emissions to 1990 levels. How is Mendocino County going to do that if our leaders have allowed the GRTA to rip out our county's only remaining connection to our national railroad network?

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And why now? Why cut Mendocino County off from our national railroad network at the very same time that the Biden administration has just launched a campaign to reconnect communities that have lost transportation opportunities, creating the Reconnecting Communities Institute, the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program, and awarding \$3.3 billion to help reconnect communities that were divided by past transportation decisions? The GRTA's efforts to cut Mendocino County off from our national railroad network seem to be doing exactly the opposite of what our federal government is seeking to accomplish. The GRTA's efforts seem especially inexplicable when Mendocino Railway has repeatedly offered to move the bureaucrats out of the way and just fix the NWP's line in Mendocino County, being just as repeatedly blocked by first the NCRA, and now the GRTA, as they simply don't want to see the railroad restored.

By building its trail on top of the existing tracks, the GRTA pays lip service to the idea that they are "preserving" rail opportunities. This is a red herring, since out of the thousands of "preserved" lines across the United States, only a handful have ever been reopened. Nor is it likely that the NWP will be reopened after the GRTA has spent up to \$1,000,000 per mile to bury them underneath a trail. The GRTA's slick political maneuver is to hide behind the fictional notion of rail preservation, so the GRTA doesn't have to return the underlying land to its original landowners, while at the same time ensuring that the land will never be used for railroad purposes again. It's a lie intended to fool the gullible. And the leaders of Mendocino County should be ashamed if they fall for it.

A trail where 55 or fewer daily users going through Mendocino County costs the county its rail future and its #1 tourist attraction.



Two members of this board are on the GRTA's board. I can understand why Caryl Hart and Senator Mike McGuire don't care about the people and businesses of Mendocino County as they live in wealthy Sonoma County. But why is this board, and those of its members on the GRTA's board, helping them hurt the people and businesses of Mendocino County? If you won't stand up for your constituents, who will? Why abandon your own constituents in favor of those of Marin and Sonoma County?

Not only are railroads far safer and more efficient than trucks, they are also far more environmentally friendly than trucks. And our company is one of the most environmentally friendly railroads in our nation, winning numerous environmental awards. Our sister company, Sierra Northern Railway, is even now building zero-emission hydrogen locomotives. We want to continue investing in Mendocino County, improve both its industry and environment, something this board, and especially some of its members, seem uninterested in.

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I encourage the board to act, to announce its opposition to the GRTA's plans, to oppose the GRTA's efforts to force the abandonment of the CWR line so that it can more easily cut Mendocino County off from our national railroad network, and to replace those representatives who sit on the GRTA's board and willingly turn their backs on the people and businesses of Mendocino County for the benefit of millionaires living in Marin and Sonoma County. It's still not too late to prevent this catastrophe for our people and businesses.

Respectfully,

MENDOCINO RAILWAY



Robert Jason Pinoli  
President