



Requests for additional information from the Press should be directed to Chairperson Hart, at her email which is carylo@me.com

Surface Transportation Board (STB) Process Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA) proposing to railbank the line from Willits to Sonoma?

- This is the next step in building the historic Great Redwood Trail.
- State law makes the priority of the GRTA very clear: Railbank the line from Cloverdale to Humboldt Bay and build the Great Redwood Trail.¹
- GRTA's rail line was closed for safety reasons 25 years ago, and the conditions of the rails have only gotten worse since then. Building a world class trail on its foundation is the best thing we can do for the people and the economy of the North Coast.
- Outdoor recreation is a booming business, and there are huge opportunities for each of the communities along the trail.

What is an Adverse Abandonment filing?

- Under federal law, a rail line such as that owned by the GRTA may not be railbanked if it causes another section of active rail that connects to the national rail system to be left without connection to that system. Adverse abandonment allows the Surface Transportation Board to find that a rail line that is not being used for interstate commerce may be officially "abandoned" so that railbanking of the line it is connected to can move forward. An adverse abandonment ruling does not impact the local rail line, but only legally disconnects it from the interstate system.

Why has the GRTA filed an Adverse Abandonment on the Skunk Train's line between Willits and Fort Bragg?

- The Adverse Abandonment determination is needed to confirm that the Skunk Train is not an operating interstate rail system, and to allow railbanking of the Willits to Cloverdale portion of the GRTA's rail line to proceed.
- Railbanking cannot be approved for the GRTA's line in the absence of this determination or a request by the Skunk ownership to railbank its own line.
- The Skunk is a private company that runs a tourist train. It's a great way to see the forests and the coast and to do some biking on their rails, but the Skunk is not a freight train running freight on the national system.
- The Surface Transportation Board made this clear last year, when it unequivocally approved the railbanking needed to build the Great Redwood Trail and rejected the Skunk application to take ownership of portions of the right of way.

¹ **SB 69 (McGuire - 2021):** 93022(a)(1) "Initiate, complete, or initiate and complete the federal Surface Transportation Board's railbanking process on its rail rights-of-way. The federal Surface Transportation Board's railbanking process may be initiated, completed, or initiated and completed by segment of the rail rights-of-way."

If granted by the STB, will the Adverse Abandonment stop the Skunk Train from operating its tourist and bike train operations, or local freight, on its Willits to Fort Bragg line?

- Absolutely not. The Adverse Abandonment has **no effect** on the rights of the Skunk Train to operate its tourist train, star gazing, concert and rail bike operations on its own line. We support all these operations and hope the Skunk Train will support our efforts to get the Great Redwood Trail built, which will only add economic benefits to the Skunk train and the north coast economy.
- Skunk Train's ownership could still begin or operate local freight operations, if the need and their equipment support it. Only interstate freight, which has never existed on the Skunk Line in the last 25 years or under current ownership, would be precluded. Freight operations of any kind would require the Skunk Train to repair tunnel collapses on their line, and to address the type of railcars that could be used.

What are the next steps in the railbanking process?

- If the private corporation that owns the Skunk Train tries to stop the Great Redwood Trail again, we are hopeful that the STB will once again side with the public interest and support the Trail.
- After a ruling is made by the STB on currently pending procedural filings, GRTA will notice and file the required adverse abandonment paperwork and formally request that the STB confirm that the Skunk Train is not connected to the national freight rail system.