

Peter Harnik
3505 N. 22nd St.
Arlington, VA 22207
703-522-5510

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Ann D. Begeman, Chair
Patrick Fuchs, Commissioner
Martin Oberman, Commissioner
Surface Transportation Board
395 "E" St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20423

Dear Ms. Begeman, Mr. Fuchs and Mr. Oberman:

I am writing to you as the co-founder, back in 1985, of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. After working at RTC for 10 years, and following a career in urban park advocacy and protection, I am now retired and returning to my "first love" by writing a history of the rails-to-trails movement in the U.S. When I'm done, the book will be published by the University of Nebraska Press.

In the course of my research on this book, I have had the opportunity to utilize numerous resources of the Surface Transportation Board, including your great collection of annual reports (going way back in time to the early years of the Interstate Commerce Commission) as well as your computerized database of filings and decisions.

However, I have come to realize that the treasure trove of information that is contained within your files and computer system is not structured in a way that is particularly user-friendly or usable. Particularly for researchers such as myself, your data is not sortable or manipulable. Yes, each filing can be separately retrieved, one-by-one, but it is not possible to get printouts of information by railroad, by state, by year, by county, by railbanking agreement or the many other categories that I am interested in studying.

I have also come to realize that many staffers within your agency, when asked certain types of abandonment and post-abandonment questions that they cannot answer, respond by referring people to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

As you may imagine, corridor abandonments are my greatest interest regarding STB data. (I already have all the information I need about the post-abandonment trails themselves.) Specifically, I am attempting to determine the location, date of abandonment, and abandoning railroad of every abandoned corridor since the beginning of the 20th century. (This amounts to approximately 110,000 miles of track.) Since approximately 20,000 miles are now official rail-

trails, I am seeking to ascertain the physical and legal status of about 90,000 miles of old corridors.

Over the years, STB staff has attempted to be as helpful as possible, and I have received some supposedly "complete" printouts of abandonments from the database, but when these lists are totaled up, they come to only about 2,300 abandonments and only about 33,000 miles. Somehow, a large number of cases are missing, many of them of relatively recent vintage.

In light of all this, I would like to make an unsolicited suggestion/proposal.

I suggest that the STB, either alone or in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Transportation and/or the Federal Railroad Administration, enter into an agreement with a contracting entity to take all the existing STB abandonment data and computerize it into a robustly searchable and manipulable database which would then be made available (for free or for a fee) to the general public.

I believe that such a database is not only of great interest to historians like myself but that it is actually of vital national interest to the government, the railroads, transportation and recreation planners, utility companies and perhaps even the military.

At one time the United States was criss-crossed by 254,000 miles of rail corridors. Today that network is down to about 137,000 miles, yet no government or private agency has a clear and complete record of where the abandoned lines are located, when they were abandoned, who owns them, what condition they are in, and myriad other facts about them.

I believe it is incumbent upon the STB to be the steward of this information, and I know that there are many people and institutions who would like to assist in this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "R. A. [unclear]". The signature is stylized and somewhat illegible.