

November 18, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Tiffany
Chairman
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Joe Neguse
Ranking member
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman and Tiffany and Ranking Member Huffman and Neguse:

We write in strong opposition to H.R. 4924, the Rails to Trails Landowner Rights Act, which would make the railbanking law unusable and threaten existing and planned trails in your states and the entire country. Since 1983, the railbanking law has supported the preservation of critical railroad corridors in rural, urban, and suburban communities and enabled the creation of thousands of miles of trails across the country. Trails are proven to generate jobs and economic opportunities, improve safety and quality of life, and improve health by providing people with opportunities to walk, bike, and be active outdoors. As leadership of the House Committee on Natural Resource and the subcommittee on Federal Lands, we urge you to preserve the successful and beneficial railbanking law and oppose this bill that will be harmful to trails in your states and the entire country.

Railbanking is a voluntary agreement between a railroad and a trail manager – often a local government – allowing a railroad corridor to be transferred to a trail manager for interim use as a trail, while preserving the corridor for the possibility of future rail service. When President Ronald Reagan signed the railbanking statute into law, he did so with the knowledge that preserving these corridors was essential to America’s economic wellbeing and national security. Today, railbanking has preserved thousands of miles of critical railroad corridors that otherwise would have become fragmented and lost to posterity. It also has catalyzed a movement to transform over 42,000 miles of multi-use trails into economic engines and transportation corridors for rural, urban and suburban communities across the country.

The “Rails to Trails Landowner Rights Act” effectively destroys the viability of railbanking, undercutting the law at the foundation of the nation’s decades-long movement to preserve unused railroad corridors as multiuse trails. The bill imposes exceedingly burdensome and

unworkable changes to railbanking, outlined below, that threaten future and existing rail-trails and will cause irreparable harm to the nation's rail corridors.

- The bill would shift financial liability for preserving a federal corridor from the federal government to trail sponsors, most often local governments, to compensate adjacent landowners for all "costs" claimed to be associated with trail use, regardless of whether there is a property interest justifying compensation.
- Trail sponsors would be required to obtain, within 30 days of filing a statement of willingness to railbank, signed written approval of every adjacent landowner as a condition of railbanking. Lack of affirmative consent from even a single landowner would preclude railbanking, leaving these corridors irreparably fragmented or lost. For substantial corridors, there will be individuals who cannot be reached in the allotted time, dooming agreements that have no opposition. Further, a single opponent would be given the power to veto efforts with broad community support even where they have no direct property interest in the corridor.
- The bill requires trail sponsors to assume lifetime responsibility for maintaining the corridor until it is reactivated for rail service, creating long-term liabilities even for short-term trail sponsors, discouraging anyone from stepping in to save a corridor pending identification of a permanent trail sponsor.
- The trail sponsor will be required to conduct and pay for unnecessary cost-benefit analysis addressing impacts on security, bio security, food security, and other irrelevant issues. This and other new, unnecessary administrative requirements could delay the railbanking process and add greater expense, discouraging trail sponsors like local governments from protecting rail corridors.
- The Surface Transportation Board (STB) will be required to review all existing railbanked corridors then provide recommendations to Congress for maintenance requirements of trail sponsors and consider adjacent landowner requests to narrow the width of corridors. This draconian expansion of federal authority exceeds the capacity of the STB, intrudes on local control and reduces flexibility to accommodate future railroad needs.

H.R. 4924, the Rails to Trails Landowner Rights Act threatens existing and planned trails and the economic opportunity, improved safety, public health, and quality of life that trails provide. We urge you to oppose this harmful bill.

Sincerely,

Rails to Trails Conservancy
Kevin Mills, Vice President of Policy

American Trails
Mike Passo, Executive Director

America Walks
Mike McGinn, Executive Director

Trust for Public Land
Reed Perry, Director, Federal Relations

The League of American Bicyclists
Bill Nesper, Executive Director

East Coast Greenway Alliance
Dennis Markatos-Soriano, Executive Director

Adventure Cycling Association
Andy Williamson, Executive Director

People For Bikes
Chris Bell, Director of Federal Policy

International Mountain Bicycling Association
Todd Keller, Director of Government Affairs

Environmental Law & Policy Center
Kevin Brubaker, Deputy Director

Transportation For America
Steve Davis, Director

American Hiking Society
Tyler Ray, Senior Director for Programs and Advocacy

Sierra Club
Katherine Garcia, Clean Transportation for All Campaign Director

The Conservation Fund
Lawrence A. Selzer, President and CEO

Cc: Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources