

March 17, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590



Re: Please Reject Funding Uinta Basin Oil Train with Tax-Exempt Bonds

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments Water Quality/Quantity Committee (“QQ”) would like to voice our deep concern for the proposed Uinta Basin Railway, a project that would allow the transportation of crude oil up the Colorado River to its headwaters. QQ comprises [40 Colorado local governments](#) in the headwaters of the Colorado, Yampa, and Gunnison River Basins, the “Headwaters Region” of Colorado, and is the only entity in Colorado dedicated to water quality and quantity protection in Colorado’s headwaters.

We urge the U.S. Department of Transportation (“DOT”) to reject the use of tax-exempt private activity bonds for the Uinta Basin Railway (“Railway”) because of the project’s potential to significantly harm communities and the environment in the Headwaters Region and throughout Colorado while also increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

A federal agency review concluded the proposed new Railway would add up to 87 million gallons of waxy crude per week to the interstate rail system. Oil would be transported via as many as 180,000 loaded rail cars per year from the Uinta Basin to the mainline of the Union Pacific where it would travel east adjacent to the Colorado and Fraser Rivers in the Headwaters Region. The Colorado River is the source of water for 40 million people and is already in crisis. The Fraser River is an important and threatened tributary to the Colorado River which has already experienced degradation from decades of low flows due to diversions to cities on the other side of the Continental Divide. The significant increase in railroad traffic raises concerns about both long-term and catastrophic water quality degradation in the Headwaters Region.

Long-term impacts from the increase in rail traffic may include, to name a few:

- Worsening of existing water quality challenges in the region, such as sedimentation and deposition of pollutants from the railcars into waterways.
- Further aquatic life impairment. Many waterways in the Headwaters struggle to sustain aquatic life and are fragile and sensitive to long-term increases in pollutants from increased rail car traffic.
- Union Pacific already has a [history of releasing damaging sludge](#) from the Moffat Tunnel into the Fraser River; the potential for additional releases would increase.

- The region's ability to meet water quality standards established by the EPA is unclear given these long-term impacts.

The increase in rail car traffic also increases the catastrophic potential for a train derailment and spill. As the recent, disastrous train derailment and chemical spill in East Palestine, Ohio shows, rail transportation of hazardous materials threatens communities, air, and water along the way. A catastrophic spill could have the following far-reaching impacts:

- Communities along the Colorado and Fraser Rivers could lose access to safe, clean drinking water and irrigation water supply.
- Environmental impacts would be widespread.
- The State's recreation and tourism economy would be adversely impacted because of the loss of fishing, rafting, and other water-based recreation income.
- Impacts in Glenwood Canyon could be particularly acute because the Canyon is already struggling to recover from damaging 2020 wildfires.
- Local investment in watershed restoration could be lost. Local governments and state and federal agencies are spending millions of dollars already to restore these watersheds. See, for example, Grand County [Learning By Doing Cooperative Effort](#).

Approving federal bonds for this project also conflicts with federal policy to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Railway would generate 56 million tons of carbon emissions annually, posing a serious threat to clean air in the Headwaters region and in direct opposition to President Biden's recent actions on climate change, including Executive Orders 13990 and 14008.

Expending the DOT's limited funds for private activity bonding authority on this oil train would reduce the amount available for worthy projects at the expense of Colorado River water quality and economic vitality.

QQ urges you to reject the Uinta Basin Railway's application to issue private activity bonds. For questions or concerns, please contact QQ Co-Director Claire Carroll at 719.740.0785 or ccarroll@nwccog.org.

Sincerely,



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