



June 26, 2023

MEMBER JURISDICTIONS
City of Glenwood Springs

ROUTT COUNTY
City of Steamboat Springs
Town of Hayden

EAGLE COUNTY
Avon
Basalt
Eagle
Gypsum
Minturn
Red Cliff
Vail

GRAND COUNTY
Fraser
Granby
Grand Lake
Hot Sulphur Springs
Kremmling
Winter Park

JACKSON COUNTY
Walden

PITKIN COUNTY
Aspen
Snowmass Village

SUMMIT COUNTY
Breckenridge
Blue River
Dillon
Frisco
Montezuma
Silverthorne

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
United State Department of Agriculture
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senator for Colorado
261 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joe Neguse
United States Representative for Colorado 1419
Longworth House Office Building Washington,
DC 20515

The Honorable Jared Polis
Colorado State Governor
136 State Capitol
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable John Hickenlooper
United States Senator for Colorado
374 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable KC Becker
Regional Administrator U.S. Environmental
Protection Agency, Region 8
1595 Wynkoop Street Denver, CO 80202

RE: Opposition to the Uinta Basin Railway Project

Dear Secretary Vilsack, Governor Polis, Senator Bennet, Senator Hickenlooper, Representative Neguse, and Regional Administrator Becker:

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments is writing in opposition to the Uinta Basin Railway Project on behalf of our 30-member jurisdiction. The project creates a risk of catastrophic environmental damage through our region and down the Colorado River, as far as California, thus outweighing the potential benefits of this project, especially in this age of much cleaner energy supply options. The project would transport up to 4.6 billion gallons of waxy crude oil per year on the Union Pacific mainline, which follows the Colorado River through many of our region’s drought-stricken areas. That includes the Glenwood Canyon, which is still recovering from the 2020 Grizzly Creek Fire, a fire that was a top priority in the United States during the two weeks it burned over 32,000 acres and later caused the 2021 debris mudslides destroying portions of I70 and Union Pacific tracks.

In 2021, the U.S. Surface Transportation Board (STB) approved the 88-mile rail network connecting Utah to the Gulf Coast. The main concerns are that STB did not accurately consider the full impact of increasing train volume on an already high-traffic rail, nor did they consider the risk of a potential catastrophic toxic spill so near the Colorado River. Letters in opposition to the Uinta Basin Railway Project have been presented to our elected officials and representatives from many of our jurisdictions including Eagle County, who sued to challenge the STB approval, which did not consider climate impacts required by the Biden administration. The Eagle County Board of County Commissioners identified several major risks, “recognizing that a dramatic increase in rail traffic represents a commensurate increase in risk (of spark-induced wildfire, vehicle conflicts, derailments, water contamination, toxic spills, etc.).”

Rockslides are common in the region, causing deadly vehicle incidents. A recent slide buried the Union Pacific tracks outside the Glenwood Canyon, partially burying a freight train. Noting four recent train disasters that involved hazardous materials potentially resulting in both serious health and environmental impacts, NWCCOG QQ Committee requested continued support

from Colorado Delegation which cited that “heavy crude oils are highly toxic and very difficult to remove from a water source; contamination is severe and long-term. In addition, oil train derailments could cause devastating forest fires in Colorado’s mountains”. An oil spill near the Colorado River headwaters could prove devastating for the environment and as many as 40 million people and major cities across the West that heavily depend on it for drinking and critical needs water.

We appreciate your attention to this incredibly important matter and urge you to object to the Uinta Basin Railway Project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alyssa Shenk', written in a cursive style.

Alyssa Shenk
Northwest Colorado Council of Governments Chair

CC:

John Whitney, Senator Bennet Regional Representative, john_whitney@bennet.senate.gov

Sarah McCarthy, Senator Hickenlooper Regional Representative,
sarah_mccarthy@hickenlooper.senate.gov

Julie Sutor, Representative Neguse Regional Representative, julie.sutor@mail.house.gov

David Oppenheim, Governor Polis Legislative Director, david.oppenheim@state.co.us