



Chaffee County Board of Commissioners

P.O. Box 699/104 Crestone Ave.
Salida, CO 81201
719.539.2218/www.chaffeecounty.org

8 May 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Michael S. Regan
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: Opposition to Uinta Basin Railway Project

Dear Secretary Vilsack, Secretary Buttigieg, and Administrator Regan,

Chaffee County Board of County Commissioners wishes to reiterate our strong opposition to the proposed activation and expansion of the Uinta Basin Railway (UBR) Project. Chaffee County leadership share the common opinion of others directly within the path and “downline” of the UBR corridor that the risks of transporting hundreds-of-thousands of barrels of toxic waxy crude oil through our mountain communities are simply too great for our residents and for the millions of visitors that journey to experience our region each year.

As has been seen with recent train derailments across the country, environmental and economic impacts that could result from derailment, wildfire ignition, and other elevated threats resulting from the Uinta Basin Railway Project could be catastrophic. According to the Federal Railroad Administration, 89 train derailments occurred throughout Colorado between 2019 and 2023, 27% of which were the responsibility of Union Pacific. The potential for, and consequences of, an accident are real and too great for our communities to bear; drinking water and soil contamination, degradation of air quality, loss of aquatic life, destruction to wildlife habitat, devastating forest fires, and interstate closures would cripple central Colorado’s environment, economy, and quality of life.

Additionally, Chaffee County residents rely heavily on the I-70 corridor along which the UBR would run. UBR operations affecting I-70 have direct potential negative consequence for our community. Disruption or closure of the I-70 corridor cuts our residents off from critical services, creates major supply chain issues that impact everything from food security to construction capabilities, as well as negatively impacts our local tourism economy. Tourism is the largest job sector in Chaffee County and is crucial to our viability. We experienced comparable challenges during the 2020 Grizzly Creek Fire



Chaffee County Board of Commissioners

P.O. Box 699/104 Crestone Ave.
Salida, CO 81201

719.539.2218/www.chaffeecounty.org

when a substantial portion of I-70 traffic – coming from along the same route proposed for UBR – was rerouted through Chaffee County on Highways 50 and 285. This caused immense traffic delays, higher emergency-response costs, safety burdens, and tourism-related impacts to the county. We find it indefensible to willingly accept the increased and on-going risk of enduring these same types of issues due to UBR and its presence along the I-70 corridor.

Finally, we ask that UBR project proponents do not receive tax-exempt Private Activity Bonds (PABs) issued by the US Department of Transportation (DOT) to fund the UBR Project. This will effectively amount to tens of millions of dollars in public subsidies every year for a project that has unacceptable environmental and health risks for Coloradans.

We respectfully urge you to prevent the Unita Basin Railway Project from moving forward until it receives the adequate and objective review it requires to account for the full risks it introduces to Colorado's communities, water supplies, and environment, as well as its effects on climate change.

Sincerely,

The Chaffee County Board of Commissioners

Keith Baker, Chairman

Greg Felt, Commissioner

P.T. Wood, Commissioner

CC:

The Honorable Joe Biden President of the United States
The Honorable Michael Bennet, U.S. Senator
The Honorable John Hickenlooper, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Jared Polis, Governor of Colorado
The Honorable Joe Neguse, U.S. Congressman
The Honorable Lauren Boebert, U.S. Congresswoman
The Honorable Brittany Pettersen, U.S. Congresswoman