

From: [Jack Brown](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#); [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Subject: February RTC Agenda Item #8 – Importance of Addressing H.R. 4924 in the RTC’s 2026 Federal Legislative Program
Date: Thursday, January 29, 2026 9:49:11 AM

Dear RTC Commissioners,

I am writing regarding February Agenda Item #8 and to express concern about the absence of H.R. 4924, the Rails to Trails Landowner Rights Act, from the final version of the RTC’s 2026 Federal Legislative Program that was submitted for Commission consideration.

During the Bicycle Advisory Committee’s review, staff was encouraged to include opposition to H.R. 4924 due to its potentially significant consequences for the development of the interim trail. Despite that recommendation, the bill does not appear in the final legislative package presented to the RTC, and I believe this omission deserves reconsideration.

H.R. 4924 poses several serious concerns for the RTC:

First, it directly threatens the legal foundation of railbanking.

The bill would weaken the federal railbanking framework that allows unused rail corridors to be preserved for future transportation while being used as trails in the interim. Undermining this framework increases legal uncertainty and invites litigation that could delay or halt trail development.

Second, it increases financial and legal risk for public agencies.

By expanding landowner claims and challenges, the bill could expose agencies like the RTC to costly lawsuits, settlements, and administrative burdens. These risks divert limited resources away from construction, maintenance, and safety improvements and toward legal defense.

Third, it jeopardizes the feasibility of the interim trail itself.

The interim trail relies on the stability and continuity of the corridor. If H.R. 4924 advances, the likelihood of fragmented ownership, contested segments, or injunctions rises—making timely and equitable trail delivery far more difficult.

Fourth, it conflicts with local, state, and federal investments already made.

Substantial public funds have been committed to planning, design, and construction based on existing railbanking law. Weakening that law after the fact threatens to strand investments and undermine public confidence in long-term infrastructure planning.

Finally, it runs counter to RTC’s stated goals around active transportation, equity, and climate resilience.

Trails created through railbanking provide safe, low-stress mobility options, improve public health, reduce emissions, and connect communities. Legislation that puts these benefits at risk should be clearly opposed.

Given these concerns, I respectfully urge the RTC to explicitly include opposition to H.R. 4924 in its 2026 Federal Legislative Program. Although the RTC does not currently consider using railbanking to create the intermediate trail per the public's knowledge, it would be

unwise to not oppose this tool should it be needed to protect the corridor. Opposing the bill would better align the RTC's advocacy efforts with its adopted transportation priorities and help protect the viability of the interim trail.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued work on behalf of active transportation and community connectivity in Santa Cruz County.

More information can be found regarding the bill at the Rails to Trails Conservancy
Website: <https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/railbanking-fact-sheet/>

Sincerely,
Jack Brown

From: [nadene thorne](#)
To: [Regional Transportation Commission](#)
Subject: Legislative Update, Agenda #8: Oppose H.R. 4924 "Rails to Trails Landowner Rights Act"
Date: Saturday, January 31, 2026 11:40:11 AM

Commissioners and Staff,

I hope you will be aware of and strongly oppose the federal H.R. 4924 Rails to Trails Landowner Rights Act. From the 2/5 meeting agenda: "RTC should also oppose federal actions or proposals that undermine sustainable, equitable, or climate-resilient transportation goals or that weaken programs supporting active transportation, transit, and safety-based projects."

This federal bill will undermine the benefits of railbanking, should the RTC choose to pursue at some future time, making unreasonably burdensome stipulations and excessive costs on rail trail sponsors. The RTC should join the many national organizations, including the Sierra Club, in opposition.

I hope you will review the below and take the necessary steps to actively oppose this bill.

Nadene Thorne

<https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/railbanking-fact-sheet/>

Partially quoted below:

How the "Rails to Trails" Landowner Rights Act" (H.R. 4924) Threatens Railbanking

The "Rails to Trails Landowner Rights Act" (H.R.4924) 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 is an unconstitutional attack on railbanking, violating Fifth Amendment rights, masquerading as a series of process improvements that are anything but.*** It introduces exceedingly burdensome and unworkable changes to railbanking, outlined below, that threaten future and existing rail-trails and risk causing irreparable harm to the nation's rail corridors.

- The bill would unconstitutionally shift financial liability 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 sponsor must 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.

- Trail sponsors must 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, which could encourage unnecessary and impractical federal control of local roles, and consider requests to narrow the width of corridors to match future railroad needs, but such needs are not known prior to reinstatement of rail service.

These draconian changes exceed the capacity of the STB to manage and will result in lost opportunities to invest in America's rural areas and cities, alongside the loss of transportation corridors, green spaces, historic sites and public trails that provide invaluable quality of life and economic development opportunities for communities nationwide.