



Innovation in Community-Driven Railway Technology

Mendocino Railway

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NEWS RELEASE

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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD CONFIRMS MENDOCINO RAILWAY'S STATUS AS A FEDERALLY REGULATED RAIL CARRIER

Fort Bragg, California – October 14, 2025 — On Friday, September 26, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) issued a definitive ruling affirming that Mendocino Railway is—and has continuously been since 2004—a Class III rail carrier subject to the Board's exclusive federal jurisdiction. The ruling confirms Mendocino Railway's standing as a federally recognized railroad governed by federal preemption.

Mendocino Railway commends the STB's decision as it provides clarity in the face of recent challenges and ensures stability for future operations. It strengthens the company's ability to preserve and enhance the California Western/Skunk Train's historic Redwood Route between Fort Bragg and Willits; while also continuing to invest in the future of Northern California's rail heritage and the communities it calls home. Additionally, the ruling underscores the importance of consistent federal standards for short line and regional railroads nationwide—a principle strongly supported by the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA).

Mendocino Railway first petitioned the STB in July for confirmation of its railroad status due to ongoing legal challenges by local municipalities and state agencies tied to the railway's acquisition of the Fort Bragg Mill Site property. The Mill Site is a roughly 300-acre oceanfront property that has remained vacant since 2002, when Georgia-Pacific closed its facilities in Fort Bragg.

Between 2021 and 2024, the City of Fort Bragg challenged Mendocino Railway's ability to operate outside of normal permitting processes as a common carrier railroad. In 2024, litigation was cooperatively paused. Since then, Mendocino Railway has collaborated directly with the City of Fort Bragg and the California Coastal Commission on a Master Development Agreement defining the responsible, mixed-use development of Fort Bragg's Mill Site property. In fact, 92% of the Mill Site development will fall under

state and local oversight, with only a small number of railroad-related activities federally preempted under the STB ruling.

“The STB’s decision provides clarity for the future of Mendocino Railway’s operations and represents an important step in preserving America’s unique rail heritage,” said Robert Jason Pinoli, President and CEO of Mendocino Railway. “What the ruling doesn’t change is our willingness to collaborate closely with the City of Fort Bragg and the California Coastal Commission to revitalize the Mill Site and make a lasting, positive impact in our community for decades to come.”

About Mendocino Railway

Mendocino Railway is a federally recognized Class III public utility and common carrier railroad providing freight, excursion, and commuter passenger services across Northern California. Formed in 2004 with approval from the Surface Transportation Board, Mendocino Railway is a subsidiary of the Sierra Railroad Company, established in 1897. The company owns and operates several lines, including the California Western Railroad in Mendocino County—home to the world-famous Skunk Train—the River Fox Train in Yolo County, and the Sunburst Train operation on the Santa Paula Branch Line in Ventura County. Mendocino Railway is committed to safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible rail operations. The company continues to invest in infrastructure, sustainability, and community partnerships that preserve California’s rail legacy and support the regions it serves. For more information, visit www.mendocinorailway.com

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