

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 13, 2022

The Honorable Brenda Mallory
Chair
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Chair Mallory:

We write to share our continuing concerns about the risks to Colorado from the pending Uinta Basin Railway Project. As the agency responsible for ensuring that environmental reviews for infrastructure projects are thorough, we request that you carefully review the analyses conducted by federal agencies thus far to determine whether the effects of this project on Colorado's communities, watersheds, and forests have been fully considered. Until such a coordinated and robust review is complete, we urge you not to allow this project to move forward.

The Uinta Basin Railway Project would enable the shipment of up to 350,000 barrels of heated waxy crude oil a day from Utah through Colorado to the Gulf Coast on as many as ten, two-mile trains a day. These trains would run directly alongside the headwaters of the Colorado River – a vital water supply that provides drinking water to millions of Colorado residents and irrigation to millions of acres of agricultural land. The Colorado River is also a critical driver of our state's recreation and tourism economies.

An oil spill in the Colorado River headwaters would be catastrophic to our state's water supplies, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation assets. In addition, an accident on the train line further increases the threat of wildfire ignition, particularly given severe drought conditions in the West. Given that many of the Colorado communities along the proposed train line are already recovering from extreme wildfires and managing unprecedented low water levels, these additional risks are unacceptable. Glenwood Canyon – which sits directly along the proposed railway route – has been grappling with severe flash flooding and mudslides that closed the interstate highway for weeks last year. We simply cannot afford the risk of an oil train derailment in these sensitive areas that are already recovering from crippling disasters, which are only projected to become more frequent and severe.

To date, it is not clear that federal agency environmental and risk analysis of the proposed railway has been commensurate with the potential dangers this project entails to Colorado communities and watersheds. We urge you to conduct a thorough review of the Surface Transportation Board (STB)'s analysis conducted to date to determine whether they have sufficiently accounted for all possible adverse effects of this project in Colorado - including a robust risk assessment of potential derailments along the Colorado River.

We continue to hear grave concerns from a wide array of local Colorado governments, water districts, and other stakeholders along the proposed rail line. Eagle County, Colorado, and conservation groups are also pursuing litigation in federal court, in large part on the basis that the STB's environmental review has not adequately accounted for the risks to Colorado. We urge the federal government to carefully evaluate its position in this litigation in light of these concerns. We have attached letters from these entities stating their vehement opposition to the project for your consideration.

We believe increasing domestic energy production is vital to replacing Russian oil and gas and to help stabilize costs for American consumers. But, we should not imperil the Colorado River or the Colorado communities that live along it.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

Cc:

Surface Transportation Board Chairman, Martin J Oberman
Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack
Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General Scott A. Spellmon
Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland
Attorney General, Merrick Garland
White House National Climate Advisor, Gina McCarthy
Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Shalanda Young