

Green Eagle Railroad EIS Public Meeting

Tuesday, April 24, 2024, 8:00 PM ET • 1h 21m 24s

SPEAKERS

Alan Belniak, Andrea Poole Transcription via Zoom.

Alan Belniak 00:00

Good evening. My name is Alan Belniak. And I'm going to assist with the digital portion of this meeting this evening. There's a couple of things to go over if you are new to the ZOOM webinar format. Tonight, we are also simulcasting in Spanish. If you would like to enable the Spanish simulcast, please click the interpretation button down below, and pick Español. We also are featuring closed captioning, if you'd like to turn that on.

Also, we are prepared to give a short presentation this evening covering the topic. At the end of the presentation, we will then be taking comments. We'll be taking comments first from elected officials, second from those who have pre-registered to submit comment, and then third, anyone else here in the meeting, who wishes to speak but did not pre-register. So, for the folks who have their hands raised, I do recognize you, I do see you. But just to let you know, we're not going to get to you until after the presentation pieces and after other people who have registered. This meeting is being recorded and once the presentation is complete, and we start the comment period, I will remind all of us of some of these items again, especially for anyone who may join late. So, with that, I'd like to turn the meeting over to Andrea, Andrea.

Andrea Poole 01:22

Hi, my name is Andrea Poole, I'm with the Surface Transportation Board and I work in the Office of Environmental Analysis. So tonight, I want to talk to you. I'm going to go over the role of the Surface Transportation Board; briefly describe the proposed action, and that's the project; introduce you to green Eagle railroad who's the applicant; talk about the process for our environmental analysis, including the purpose in need; and how the board will use the decision and what their action is in the in this overall review. I'm going to tell you about the federal agencies that have decisions for this project. And then I'm going to tell you a little bit about our environmental process. We will then show you how to make comments, how to stay engaged throughout our process, and then it'll be time for us to listen to you. And as a reminder, we won't be responding to your comments, but we will be taking notes, alright?

So, the Surface Transportation Board, or the Board as we call it, is an independent federal regulatory agency with jurisdiction over certain surface transportation matters, including new rail line construction. Within the Board, the office I work in, the Office of Environmental Analysis, is responsible for directing the environmental review process. And that is we'll be conducting an independent analysis of the environmental data and making environmental recommendations to the Board. So here is an image - let me give you the image of the proposed action. Let me turn on my handy [inaudible]. So, the Green Eagle Railroad is a 1.3-mile rail line that starts at the Union Pacific Mile 1.3, Mile 13 actually, and it'll travel a little bit south and west to the Rio Grande and then to Mexico and it is this yellow line that I've showed you. It'll be a double track rail corridor with no roads crossing the rail line at-grade. It would extend across the Rio Grande on a new bridge. The line, this line, is actually part though of a larger project that includes a new roadway for trucks and other commercial vehicles that will

cross the Rio Grande on it on a different new bridge. There are also inspection facilities where Customs and Border Protection would operate in a tower here, inspection here. This green, on the line, is inspection facilities and secondary hazmat facilities also all in this portion and that will attach to a farm to market road. So that entire project will be reviewed. Now in Mexico both the proposed rail line and the Proposed Roadway will continue for about 18 miles in the Mexican state of Coahuila, connecting to existing corridors the Ferromex for the rail and, you know, the regular highway system in Mexico. It is important to note though, that the proposed action is not a project sponsored by the federal government.

Alright, so the applicant is Green Eagle Railroad, LLC and they requested authority to construct and operate the proposed rail line and they're a subsidiary of Puerto Verde Holdings. Puerto Verde Holdings will be building the rail line, the road, and the inspection facilities as well as the bridges. So, the whole project includes those components, but the Board only has a decision to make on the rail line. Alright, so Green Eagle Railroad is proposing a new rail line, and this is what we call the Purpose and Need for the proposed action. So according to Green Eagle Railroad, the project is necessary to develop an economically viable solution to meet the need for border infrastructure improvements at Eagle Pass that will increase safety and facilitate additional binational trade between the United States and Mexico. So according to Green Eagle, this proposed rail line would resolve rail congestion, reduce cross border wait times on both sides of the border, and route rail traffic around the urban center of Eagle Pass. So, the Surface Transportation Board will review the transportation merits of the proposed Green Eagle Railroad project, the rail line, and the potential impacts. And then the Board will issue a final decision to authorize with appropriate conditions or to deny GER's request for authority to construct and operate that rail line. So, they can, the Board will issue a decision to either grant their request and require any appropriate conditions or deny it. And there are a few federal agencies aside from the Surface Transportation Board that have a role in this. So, the United States Coast Guard would issue a bridge permit for the project and so the Coast Guard is requested to be a cooperating agency with us. In addition, the International Boundary and Water Commission and the United States Corps of Engineers will both review engineering plans to ensure safety, treaties, and OSH issue permits as necessary by those agencies as well. Alright, my favorite slide. The Surface Transportation Board provided a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) at the end of March. Right now, we're in the scoping process and this is where we get public input and agency input on the aspects of the project that we should review for environmental concerns such as traffic congestion, air, noise, quality, and socioeconomic things we should look at. From there, we'll take the comments that we gathered during the scoping process, and we'll develop the scope of study for the Environmental Impact Statement. From there, we'll move on to the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and we will make that Draft Environmental Impact Statement, that EIS, available for your review and for agency comment. When we're there, the public will have a chance to review that document and provide comments. You can tell us if there's anything you missed, if we need to look at something in a little more detail, and then we will take that back, those comments back, and we will prepare a Final EIS and we will respond to the comments that we've received - well, the substantial comments. If you say you approve of the project or you don't like the project - we'll summarize those sorts of stuff. Then we will prepare a Final Environmental Impact Statement and that will be available for review as well. We will provide the draft all the comments and responses. The Final EIS and my office will make recommendations to the Board for their consideration along with the transportation merits, and then the board will make their decision.

Alright, these are some of the potential impact areas that we're going to be discussing in our analysis. And you'll note that others [are] to be determined through scoping. We leave space and we take these comments so that we can add any of the local area and agency concerns

that aren't sort of like these general impact areas that we discussed. So we would love to hear from you guys. Alright, there are several ways to comment, and all comments will be considered equally, regardless of how you submit them. So, at this evening's meeting, you can fill out... so you can make an oral comment tonight. We will show you how to fill out the comment form on the web on the OEA's website in just a second. You can mail a written comment to me at the address on the screen or well, you would submit your comment electronically from the from the website so that's a little sort of a double deal. Alright and then I have a nifty film to walk you through how to fill out the form electronically. On this form, you're able to add maps or pictures or documents you'd like to share with this as well as a prepared comment and just attach it. And then you'll submit this, [with] the submit button. Now here is a view of the Board's sponsored project website which provides information about the project. This is a good way to stay up to date on the happenings of the project, look at maps, [and] look at documents that are ready. And there's a forum that allows you to be added to our mailing list. Now we will periodically update our website as the project progresses so make sure you save this as a homepage and check it out periodically. Alright, how to stay engaged. The project website that I just showed you, the Board website at the Surface Transportation Board, there's a public action button and you can go there and type in the thing to comment and then you can see all the documents that are related to the project there. Feel free to email us or call the information line. Now the information line isn't... there'll be somebody that will listen to messages and get back to you within 24 hours, maybe a couple of days over the weekend. Alright? And then last, but not least, I want to thank you all so much for being here tonight. And I'm looking forward to hearing your comments. Alan, I'm going to turn it back over to you.

Alan Belniak 15:32

All right, thanks very much. Give me one moment to resume the content sharing. And we will get started. Okay, thank you, Andrea. And thank you, everyone. Once again, my name is Alan, I'm going to assist with the comment moderation. If you're here at the beginning, I'll remind you all if you joined late, thanks for joining us. Just a couple of reminders, you can listen to this presentation in Spanish if you click the interpretation icon in the bottom tray of zoom controls. You can also toggle closed captions on or off. You will also see a raise hand button and that's a signal to me that you'd like to offer comment. First, however, we're going to offer the opportunity for elected officials to raise their hand, to let us know that they're here in the audience and speak so if they are, if you are an elected official, again, just for the moment, just elected officials, please raise your hand. Okay, I didn't see any net new hands go up so I appreciate that. Next, we're going to go over to the pre-registered speakers. And then after that, we'll go over to anyone in the audience who would like to comment, but just didn't happen to pre-register. And for the folks who I saw your hands up earlier, we will be sure to get to you. Okay, so if I look over my list, Oh, and one sorry, one more reminder getting ahead of myself. This meeting is being recorded. I just want to make sure everyone knows that. Okay. The first registered Speaker I see in our list is Clay Kilmore. Clay Kilmer. I don't see Clay in the audience. But Clay if you happen to perhaps join under a different name and you're here, please let us know. One more call for Clay Kilmer. Okay, I don't see Clay. I will check at the end and see if Clay has joined. The second is Alicia Gonzalez. And I do see Alicia in the audience. Alicia, I have now sent a command to your device to unmute your line. And when you do, please unmute your line. Please state and spell your name for the record and you have up to three minutes to share your comment.

Elisa Salas 17:56

Yes, my name is Alicia Gonzalez, A-L-I-C-I-A G-O-N-Z-A-L-E-Z.

Alan Belniak 18:01

Thank you.

Elisa Salas 18:02

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak. I do have a question. So if you hear my oral comments, can I still submit a written comment?

Alan Belniak 18:13

Okay, the answer is yes.

Comment 1 - Elisa Salas 18:15

Okay, so I haven't heard much except what you present right now. And I am very concerned with railway passing through, you know, basically our front yards and backyards. I live on Barrera Street. So, in looking at the map, and I'm a little bit spatially challenged, so what I, from what I can see is that it's about a football field away from my house. Now my mom lives next to me and my sister lives next to me and all my neighbors are close by, and I think it's too close for comfort. I think that in case of a chemical spill or derailment, you know what is going to happen? If it happens, what is the response time, you know, who is going to get us out? We have, you know, most of the area, I would venture to say our elderly people, you know, that have, you know, problems with their health so it causes a problem. But I am concerned about that. I did a little bit of research and I know that there's almost about 1,000 derailments a year. The one that happened in East Palestine in Ohio was horrible. 11 cars derailed, you know, driving all that chemical hazardous material into the ground, the town had to be evacuated, a plume of smoke, they had to do a detonation so that, you know, they could, I guess, bear what was there? But I'm concerned about those things. If we've, you know, if there's a railway going there, what is going to happen? Now, it is a known fact that we're in a flood zone so I'm afraid that, you know, what is this going to do to the problems that we already have? Is it going to exacerbate more what, you know, is happening already and what studies are going to be done to conduct, you know, a thorough study - is that going to exacerbate the problem that we already have, as it is, you know, with very heavy rain that we have, you know, we're nervous that we're going to flood and now having that railway, I'm thinking what is going to happen if a study is not made, that is thoroughly made to see the effects of that? Also, then the noise pollution, you know, that's quakes, whistles, grinding brakes, you know that that takes a toll on our health. It increases, creates stress and raises hormone levels. And I know that there was a study, I can't recall right now, one of the health journals says that there is a direct correlation between diabetes and railways that are close by excluding, you know, those lifestyle factors, because, you know, people might say, well, it's your lifestyle factors. But there is a link that has been studied already. So, I'm concerned about that. Now, speaking for myself and the houses that are around us, those houses are old houses. My house was probably built in the early seventies. So, as it is, I don't think there is structurally sound to have a railway pass by, you know, 100 feet away. Those vibrations will probably, you know, deteriorate the structure even more. What else?

Alan Belniak 21:29

I'm sorry. I'm sorry, we're giving each person up to three minutes to speak. Okay. So...

Elisa Salas 21:38

Real quick, I just respectfully urge the Board to look at all this, you know, listen to our concerns. And don't deny us the basic rights of clean air, clean water in a healthful environment. And I thank you for that time.

Alan Belniak 21:54

Thank you very much. Okay, thank you, Alicia. The next person on my list that I see who has pre-registered is Lynn Balderas. And so, Lynn, just as before, you now have a command to unmute your microphone. When you come on the line, please state your name and spell it please. And then you have up to three minutes to share your comments. Hi, Lynn.

Lynn Balderas 22:31

Hello. Hello, can you hear me?

Alan Belniak 22:33

We can hear you.

Comment 2 - Lynn Balderas 22:34

Okay. My name is Lynn Brandon Balderas. I'm a resident of Eagle Pass. I'm a grad student. I would like to express my concerns, regards to the railroad. I live within the Elm Creek, Kiosko area, which is about a mile a mile and a half from the proposed railroad. And I'm concerned about the development in the Elm Creek floodplain and in the Seco Creek floodplain. I've tried to email a contact, Mr. Garibay of Puerto Verde, and I've also tried to speak with local authorities including the County Judge Ramsey Cantu regarding any potential mitigation factors or riverside, creekside mitigation that would prevent any environmental concerns such as vegetation clearing and wildlife displacement, pollution, and all those environmental factors and I haven't received any response. My main concern was, would it be... my main concern is would there be any substantial wildlife displacement and any environmental pollution and degradation factors? So those are my main concerns and as was the noise and everything else. And one main concern I had was the flooding, you know, it is in a floodplain and my main concern is if there's a flood, whatever will be affected. So those are just some of my concerns. I'm hoping that some kind of plan that will mitigate environmental degradation and will promote a harmonious relationship between Seco Creek and Elm Creek and the proposed facilities. Once again, thank you so much Surface Transportation Board for giving me the opportunity to voice my concerns. Thank you.

Alan Belniak 25:08

Thank you, Lynn. Okay, looking at my list of pre-registered speakers, I'm looking for a Laura Sanchez. I do see a Laura with their hand raise. I don't know if it's Laura Sanchez, but we're

going to find out in just a moment. So Laura, you now have a command to unmute your microphone. And when you...

Laura Sanchez 25:35

Yes. Hello, can you hear me?

Alan Belniak 25:36

Yeah, I'm sorry. We just heard a little bit of background noise as well. Is this Laura Sanchez?

Laura Sanchez 25:41

Yes, speaking.

Alan Belniak 25:43

Okay, great. So, if you could just state, spell your name, and then you have up to three minutes to share your comments.

Laura Sanchez 25:52

Yes, my name is Laura Sanchez Corpus, and I am... we're here, we're doing a community watch. We're actually in a building where we have a lot of community members who want to speak. Not everyone was able to register so I want to know how we can open up the floor for those who did not register. Jose Corpus is the one who has the computer for everyone.

Alan Belniak 26:25

Okay, so I do see a hand raised by Jose Corpus. You're saying Jose Corpus is with you and has a computer?

Laura Sanchez 26:34

Yes. And then we have we are about 20/25 members who wants to speak as well.

Alan Belniak 26:41

So you have 20? Not just 25 people there are 25 people who want to speak?

Laura Sanchez 26:46

More or less? Yes.

Alan Belniak 26:48

Okay, I look to the project team to make a decision how you want to handle this, Andrea and other VHBers?

Laura Sanchez 27:01

Sounds good. Um, yes, we are here waiting because not everybody has access to the internet and not everybody is able to make that comment. So, we are here wanting to make a comment and be heard. And they don't know how to use Zoom so we're making a community watch so that they are able to be heard.

Alan Belniak 27:23

I understand if you could just turn down the audio in your room because we're getting that back into this line. It's hard for our translator who you're hearing and now we're hearing as well.

Alan Belniak 27:39

So, okay, so what this is what we'll do, we have one more registered speaker, another hand raised, and then what I think we can do is we can come back to you, and we'll work together to process the speakers that are in the room. Okay.

Laura Sanchez 27:55

Perfect, sounds good. Thank you so much.

Alan Belniak 27:57

Okay, I will come back to you. Alright, for now, we are, Laura, we're going to, I'm going to turn off your mic but you will keep your hand up so don't lower your hand. Okay? The next person I would like to call on is, just want to see if they're still with us, is Luis Mendoza. Luis, if you are if you are ready, you now have a command to unmute your microphone. And just as the others before you, please just state your name, spell your last name. And then you have up to three minutes to share your comments.

Comment 3 - Luis Mendoza 28:36

Okay, good evening, everybody. My name is Luis Mendoza, L-U-I-S M-E-N-D-O-Z-A. I am a resident of the Bass Subdivision. Let me just start off by saying thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this evening. Let me start off by saying that the residents of Bass Subdivision are staunchly against this project. Trains cause loud noise vibrations that can be felt in the nearby homes. This leads to disturbances especially during the night that will affect the quality of life for all of those living in nearby areas. In addition, railroads pose safety risks, especially hazardous materials that are transported, which can have serious consequences if something were to happen along the freshwater supply of the area and the state of Texas, as the proposed route traverses the Rio Grande River, one of our largest freshwater rivers in the state. Construction and operation of a railroad can have environmental impacts including noise pollution, air pollution, and potential impacts to local wildlife. Just a year ago, as one of our other residents said, in East Palestine, Ohio, an environmental disaster occurred when trains derailed, spilling hazardous chemicals into the water supply and into the air. What assurances can Puerto Verde give that a train derailment will never happen in our community? The proposed area for the construction railway and bridge is in a floodplain and the areas in Mexico where the bridge would traverse are abandoned coal mines where the land is inherently unstable. Moreover, this proposed project will cause large disruptions to the residents of Eagle Pass, the proposed project cuts right through the one of the busiest

boulevards in the city. The project will cross traffic congestion during and after construction, leading to increased travel time for the residences for the rest of our lives. The construction and operation of a railroad could disrupt the local community, including changes to landscapes and community character. The presence of a railroad would... could potentially decrease property values and the associated noise, vibration, and visual impact of the infrastructure. Another concern is the economic impact of the City of Eagle Pass as a private railway and bridge will reduce the tax revenue for the citizens of the entire city and county. In closing, I propose that Puerto Verde find a new route for the bridge and railway. Through a lot of hard work and sacrifice from the residents of Bass Subdivision and other affected communities, we were able to purchase a home to raise our families. We do not want our quiet and safe neighborhood to become an industrial zone and that's what this project is going to lead you in the long term. Again, thank you for your time. And those are my comments.

Alan Belniak 31:16

Thank you, Luis. Okay. Alright, that is the end of the list of pre-registered speakers we have. Next, I'm going to turn to folks who have raised their hand. But just again, just a reminder, for Laura and I believe working together with Jose Corpus, we're going to come to you at the end because you represent a much larger room. So, I do see your hands up, we're just going to get to you in just a moment, okay? So the next hand raised I see is Amerika Garcia Grewal and Amerika, if you would like to take yourself off of mute, just like the others, you are able to.

Amerika Garcia 32:03

Amerika Garcia Grewal with the Eagle Pass Border Coalition. Are you able to hear me at all?

Alan Belniak 32:07

Yes, but could you turn down the audio? Because we're hearing the interpreted language come through? Could you just turn that down?

Comment 4 - Amerika Garcia 32:17

Okay. I just like to say that I'm with the group with Jose Corpus and Laura and we are with the Eagle Pass Boarder Coalition, and we actually have Wi Fi in the room, a projector, a computer. We're in the neighborhood, because I know you felt that you were close to us to do your presentations, but you're actually very far away from us in terms of Eagle Pass terms. And we really feel that, in terms of environmental justice, you need to come to our neighborhoods, in order for us to do this. A number of people who are here in the room today have no awareness whatsoever this was going on. When this was passed by the mayor, it took away tax revenue from the City of Eagle Pass, which deprived these neighbors of vital services. Then when the same man passed this in the county judge, but as a county judge, there was very little awareness for the community to weigh-in at that time. So unfortunately, we're airing our dirty laundry in public because this all went through behind the scenes. And now like I said, these neighbors are finding out about it from their own neighbors in that federal holding situation, this group meeting here in the room. As you've probably already heard before, this is going to have significant impacts for air quality to the neighbors, as well as increase the level of noise in quiet neighbors, neighborhoods already, which are very close to schools. We have the Eagle Pass junior high school we have Seco Mines Elementary, and we have a kindergarten program and HeadStart program that are also in this neighborhood.

Another issue we have is that the sight of the bridge is less than one mile above the water intake for the entire City of Eagle Pass. We've already had hazardous spills on average is 1,000 train derailments in the course of the year and in spite of this particular railroad location, it is directly above the intake for the entire City of Eagle Pass, but that also that supplies much of Maverick County. You've already heard mention about traffic, Eagle Pass has horrible traffic. During peak times, we'd have bridge wait times as many as 12 hours and the idea that you would bring that kind of traffic to this quiet neighborhood is just unreasonable. The other thing is that we're already experiencing severe impacts to our river from Operation Lonestar. We've had rapid devegetation, we have containers that are on the water and this project would add insult to injury by increasing the devegetation, increasing the erosion, increasing all of the impacts on the river in a completely avoidable project. So again, speaking with the Eagle Pass Boarder Coalition and with a roomful of people who did not have earlier access to this, we'd really like to emphasize that this is an underhanded project that is not reflecting the will of the people of Eagle Pass, perhaps the business community, but not the citizens of Eagle Pass who depend heavily on the tax revenue from the current bridges, and who already are lacking in vital services because of the low economic status of our community. So we appreciate this, thank you. And also, the raising the phone, the hand again, for Laura Sanchez, Jose Corpus, and Amerika Garcia because we're passing the devices around the room. So that'll be different folks here in the room.

Alan Belniak 35:28

Okay, so give me one moment to... so we have one other name that I don't think is with you in the room and then what we can do is. I'll do one more call to see if other folks online who would like to speak. First, I'm just doing one more call for Clay. I don't see clay in the room. But I want to make sure Clay's got the opportunity. Okay, you know, Clay. Alright, I'm going to call the next name, but just as a heads up for the folks who are offering comments. Thank you. That is the point of this meeting, and we sincerely appreciate it. Just remember, as many of you are taking advantage of, we have a secondary language interpretation happening. So please do your level best to speak just a touch slower to give everyone an opportunity to give our star interpreter the opportunity to translate the spoken word into Spanish or vice versa as it is. Okay? So, one more name I want to call on is and apologize if I say this incorrectly, is... Maria Ovi. In fact, if you would like to take yourself off of mute, correct my pronunciation of your name, spell it, and then you'll have up to three minutes to share your comments.

Mireya Oviedo 36:42

Yes, I put Mireya Ovi but it's actually Mireya Oviedo.

Alan Belniak 36:46

Maria. Okay.

Mireya Oviedo 36:49

[Inaudible] spelling. It's Mireya, M-I-R-E-Y-A. And Oviedo is O-V-I-E-D-O.

Alan Belniak 37:00

Thank you.

Comment 5 - Mireya Oviedo 37:04

I think most people already touched over the main concerns. The main concern for this are basically the pollution in the soil, air, water, also noise pollution. It's also important because it's very heavy, like the noise of a very heavy railroad that makes noise and with this one can be even more noisy. And as mentioned, that the people who are close will... the vibrations and all that they're going to feel and their properties also, I'm guessing that maybe some of the people's properties are, they're too close. They're going to be too close to a train might be devaluated in terms of value, their value might go down. And also, will [inaudible] I don't know if they by there's like an accident, a derailment, accidental spilling from chemicals, or anything. This is a small town, and we really don't have... we don't really have specialists are very, very few specialists here. So, everything is... every time you need to see a specialist, you usually have to go to Laredo, San Antonio, Houston. So it's really it's not just... it's not easy for us to see specialists for health concerns, here. We just have basically family doctors and that's it. Also, like, we do know that your lifestyle does a lot for your health, but also... a lot of it's also environmental, [the] environment also affects your health a lot. So I think we need clean water, clean... everything clean, clean as it can be water, air, everything, because environment also plays a large role in that. And also, I believe, I don't know, I just, I kind of by-casualty found out about this. I don't think there's enough awareness about what's going on. I just found out through a friend about this. So [inaudible] because I believe there are people who don't who aren't even aware that this is going... that is actually going on. So I'll be honest with you somehow bring more awareness to the people here in Eagle Pass. Basically, the main concern I have is health. I think that everything that concerns to health that might be affected by the train and also, we have a lot of children. There are a lot of schools around the area where the train's going to be at so and there will be a lot of... even more traffic. This is a small town and there's a lot of traffic, especially during school hours. So those are those are my main concerns.

Alan Belniak 39:52

Okay. Thank you very much for sharing us. Okay, at the moment, I see two hands raised. And those are Jose Corpus and Amerika and, if memory serves, those are still representing the people that are in the room. And so now I'd like to try to do this as orderly as possible so we can hear comments from folks in the room. The way I have... I think I figured it out is that you are listening to the Spanish translation in the room, which is fine, thank you for doing so. If you're going to pass a phone, a microphone, or something around to do that, perhaps you can maybe step away from the laptop, so we don't hear that audio as you are giving your comments? So almost like create, like a speaker area in your room, if you can. I can't see the room. I don't know what it's like. But just the best possible option to have us not hear the Spanish interpretation fed back into the phone that you're all using, because it does get a little bit confusing, especially for our interpreter who's on the line, who's hearing her own voice again, on delay. So, if you could do that, that would be great. I don't know exactly how many people... I don't know who has the telephone who has a laptop so I'm going to start with Jose. Jose, if you now have the ability to take yourself off of mute, and maybe you can help me understand what the situation in the room is like.

Jose Alonso Corpus 41:36

(Original comment in Spanish. This is an English translation.)

Yes, thank you. About the time, please do not start the timer. We are going to do this in order. We are going to tell people whether they are sitting at the computer or whether they take a phone to say their name and where they are from so we can have order regarding their names. I am going to give my testimony in English because I want to give it in English, and I am ready for the timer...

Alan Belniak 41:56

Jose? Espera por favor. We have our Spanish translator in the Spanish channel right now. So we, we need to...

Jose Alonso Corpus 42:10

I'm going to change it to English, alright?

Alan Belniak 42:13

Oh, thank you. Yes. And we and then our translator or interpreter rather, will translate what you're saying into Spanish into the Spanish channel.

Comment 6 - Jose Alonso Corpus 42:22

Right. So let me [inaudible]. Alright, so yes, can you hear me? Yeah. Alright so my name is Jose Alonso Corpus. I will be directly impacted by the construction of this project. I live in Commentary Avenue, which is about a quarter mile from the proposed route, and about less than a mile from the proposed emergency waste pit. Maverick County has a history of being underfunded and underrepresented. We have problems such as the lack of funding to fix simple things like flooding issues, access to clean water, drainage, and to take care of traffic congestion problems. The proud that... this project only confirms how badly we are represented that we continue to be a target of environmental discrimination and social injustices. I am happy for the increased business opportunities but unfortunately, our county already suffered from high levels of pollution due to the carbon dioxide emissions produced by traffic and the congestion on bridge one and bridge two and also in Veteran Boulevard and intersection with 277. This is very disappointing. So, all these emissions contribute to the formation of particulate matter; you will probably know what is particulate matter and how particulate matter affects our health. The added emissions produced by the burning of diesel fuel from the locomotive and semi-trucks will only increase the risk of negative effects to our health. Our neighborhood parks and schools especially the children and adults with respiratory problems and it is linked to cancer. People with heart and or lung disease, children or older adults, are more likely to be affected by particulate pollution and exposure. This project will be constructed, you know, within less than a mile from three public schools: Seco Mines Elementary, Eagle Pass Junior High, Seco Mines HeadStart. The Seco Mines HeadStart is located on Sanchez Street, which is approximately less than half a mile from the proposed emergency HAZMAT waste pit. We got to [inaudible] that each year there is more than 1,000 trains that go off tracks by bridges, and do a lot of damage to structures and residential homes. This project, that has been built right next to a designated flooding area, which already poses a community safety hazard - that should be considered a red flag for your administration. On

February 1994, Executive Order 12898, federal action to address environmental justice, even a minority population and low income population, was relieved in these executive order directed the Department of Transportation and Environmental Protection Agency to make environmental justice part of its mission. But we have not seen environmental justice here, we have not seen FEMA, we have not seen Federal Railroad Administration and we don't know if they're going to have jurisdiction over this construction. Will these entities, will be required to comply with Executive Order 12898? And are we going to get assurance that we're not going to experience another Palestine, Ohio disaster?

Alan Belniak 45:46

Okay, thank you, Jose. Um, alright, with that. Okay, looks like I see Amerika's hands raised and Amerika, I believe you represent... you're in the room. Again, I just want to remind everyone, if you have prepared remarks, thank you for coming prepared. But please, if you're reading them, you need to speak slowly. Our interpreters is working her very best to keep up with the comments you're offering. But if you offer them too fast, she's just simply can't... translate into the other language for you all, to hear them. So please, as a service to one another, make sure you can speak loudly enough and clearly enough and slowly enough, so we can all benefit from the comment you have to share with us. So with that, I'm going to go to Amerika. And Amerika, I believe, just confirm with me that you're in the room. Is that correct?

Amerika Garcia 46:45

I am in the room, but we decided it's best for everyone to come to the computer because of that reverb, the central computer with the main speaker seems to have the best audio. So we're just kind of rearranging. Yeah. So, one second, please. If there's another speaker, maybe go to them, and then we'll get up here.

Alan Belniak 47:03

Perfect. Thank you for that. All right, I do see, I see. Maria, has a hand still raised? I'm not sure. I think we have heard from you in for a moment. So, if you have a comment at the end of the folks in the room, we'll come back to you. Thank you. Okay, so just in the lowering of the hand... Jose Corpus, I see your hand raise again, you just spoke a moment ago. So, I think what we'll do is, if you still have another comment, and this time, we'll come back to after the folks in the room. While we wait for the folks in the room to get organized. Once again, I'm calling out for Clay Hill. I don't see Clay Hill, just checking once more. I don't see any other net new hands raised. So with that, I will turn back to Amerika. You... Amerika, you have the ability to unmute whenever you're ready. So finish, please. Yep, so you don't have to raise your hand you all you all you need to do is unmute when you are ready to speak now because we don't have the benefit of seeing the name of the people who are going to speak in the room, folks in the room, please, if you could do your best to state and then spell your name and then you'll have three minutes just like everyone else. So Amerika, whenever you are ready, you can unmute.

Olga Ramos 48:25

Oh, yeah. Hello. Hello. I can hear. Olga Ramos. Commissioner Precinct Three. Can you hear me?

Alan Belniak 48:36

Yes, we can hear you.

Comment 7 - Olga Ramos 48:39

Miss Poole. Hello, I met you already. I... we had a meeting. I went to both of your hearings. I was there present and I'm here supporting my constituents and I'm briefly going to touch base. Again, what I expressed my concerns, and I'm going to let my constituents speak. I just want to emphasize their concerns on the traffic issues that we discussed, and I liked what you propose to do the traffic study that will address those concerns, the water intake concerns for clean water, possibly moving water intake, and the big one, the environmental concerns. So I'm going to go ahead and pass the microphone to somebody else I just wanted to emphasize, I'm here supporting the constituents. And please listen to what they have to say. Thank you.

Audience Member 49:45

Jose Corpus has the big theater setup and the better speaker so I can move around the room, but we'd better if he were unmuted or his computer were unmuted and will people sit there.

Alan Belniak 49:57

Okay, so should I put you on mute to avoid the feedback. Yes, please.

Audience Member 50:01

and then recognize him and we'll understand. Yes, perfect. Thank you.

Alan Belniak 50:09

Okay, Jose, you should have the option to unmute your mic... okay, Jose, you should have the option to unmute your mic when you're ready. Okay, perfect. Again, just a reminder, if you could speak loudly, clearly, and slowly, and state your name and spell your name for the record, and then you'll have three minutes.

Comment 8 - Jessie Fuentes 50:45

Thank you. My name is Jessie Fuentes and I am a member of the Eagle Pass Border Coalition. And I am a lifelong resident of Eagle Pass in Maverick County. In 1954, we had a historical flood, here in Eagle Pass, which took all the bridges and killed hundreds of people. And ever since then, the priority has been to make sure that we focus on where water could be mitigated, and floods could be controlled. And I'm very concerned about building structures in a federally recognized emergency area by FEMA that is a flood zone. And there was a study that was conducted a while back that indicates that that area should be left alone, it should be a green space. And if there's any people that have property that's prone to flooding, that they should be bought out. And I'm here once again, just to reiterate, we should not build any type of structures on what is designated as a floodplain. The study conducted a 100-year study, and several in between, and the results were not good. The recommendations were strong to leave Seco Creek alone and it made some other recommendations on some other creeks, but once again, I'm here to speak on behalf of the Rio Grande, its ecosystem, its tributaries, and just to try to give us a win, because over the last year and a half, we've seen

some incredible destruction of the Rio Grande and our main drinking source. And I'm here as an environmentalist, I'm here as a citizen, I'm here as an advocate for humanity. A lot of these people were not informed about this process.

There's a lot of questions as far as how the financing is going through. But from my concern, is just the quality of life and protecting our main water source. We're over 100,000 people from this county in our community, and also for Piedras Negras, we are over a quarter of a million people. So that is my concern. That's what I wish to express. And thank you for your time once again, appreciate talking to you.

Alan Belniak 53:23

Thank you. Okay, so I believe however, you have the next person in line. If you want to step up to the computer, the microphone volume is a touch low so if you could speak up just a little bit, and of course, please remember to speak clearly and slowly. State your name, spell your name, and then I'll start the timer for three minutes.

Comment 9 - Leticia Martinez 53:48

(Original comment in Spanish. This is an English translation.)

Okay. My name is Leticia Martinez and I am a resident of the area where it is planned [no sound] and I, well, I oppose this Green Eagle Railroad project and I believe all the people that are present here share the same thinking. I think this railroad is very good but it would be better if it were to be located in a different area where it is not so densely populated, since the area where they plan to build it is a residential area, which would be greatly affected as it would bring many problems mainly related to health, water pollution, the environment, traffic, and besides it would also affect the value of our properties. I feel that our... the area where they are thinking to build it does not need a railroad and I think that there is no infrastructure for a project of this magnitude. It would be better if it were outside of this area. That is all I have to say and I feel that everyone present here feels the same. Thank you.

Alan Belniak 55:12

Gracias, yes. Okay. Um, next person in the room. Once again, please say in state and spell your name. And I will start the timer for three minutes.

Comment 10 - Gabby Martinez 55:30

Hello, my name is Gabby Martinez. I live in... on Sunny Sol Drive, I think now it is known as Sunny Sol Heights. I too will be affected by this railroad as, I guess, my house is located less than a quarter mile from the recommendation. My biggest concern is going to be the neighborhood, just the area where we live. There really is just one entrance and I'm going to say that in that block subdivision, we probably have... over anywhere from 100 to 150 houses, including apartments and I mean, we're just so close to any hazard or emergency that might happen. The traffic that was earlier stated on Highway 277 is just ridiculous. It's just going to be worse with this railroad. No one is talking about a proposed overpass, and no one is talking about emergency services such as the fire department, ambulances... it just... we're far away from the nearest fire department so, I just don't see how you know this would benefit our small community because even a fire, you know, in our area, takes the fire department a while to get to us, again stating that one entrance into our small subdivision. So yes, we definitely oppose

this railroad that is being recommended. Thank you.

Alan Belniak 57:30

Thank you very much. Okay, next in the room, please... or are there other speakers in the room or just attendees?

Laura Sanchez 57:51

Okay, so my name is Laura Sanchez. Hi again.

Alan Belniak 57:54

Hi, Laura.

Laura Sanchez 57:57

Okay, so, um, I live on Commissary Avenue and...

Alan Belniak 58:01

Well, okay, sorry, I thought you spoke earlier you were just letting us know you're in the room. I apologize. Please continue.

Comment 11 - Laura Sanchez 58:09

And so, I am concerned with everything that all the other residents have mentioned by... but I am a lot more concerned about the waste pit than that is being planned on Ritchie Road. Ritchie Road is a few blocks... feet away from my house and it is also very close to a HeadStart. That is like the closest to a residential area, a school, and I believe that we should not be exposed to the harmful emissions that this waste pit is prone to have. I believe, like I said, we are concerned about the harmful effects the chemicals and everything that the children and the residents are or will be exposed to. We do not want it close to our homes, we want it as far away as possible. I don't know you know, you know, the planning, the zoning, but I believe the area where it's being planned, it's not the best to have it.

Alan Belniak 59:19

Okay, thank you for your comments, Laura, I appreciate those. Scanning our list I don't see any other net new hands raised so we will continue with folks in the room.

Comment 12 - Amanda Flores 59:38

(Original comment in Spanish. This is an English translation.)

Hello, my name is Amanda Flores. I also live near the area where it is being planned to build the railroad and I am against it since studies have shown that people who live near railroads tend to develop more cardiovascular illnesses among others like hypertension. In the area where we live personally, it's a recent area that is located on the opposite side where the railroad would also travel. We have a large elderly population for whom it would be too harmful

for their health matters since most of them suffer from one of these three health difficulties. Another reason why I oppose it is the pollution every train causes and adds annually... carbon per year, which would be 35 million metric tons of carbon contamination. This would also be pretty harmful for all of us who live within the area where they are planning this train to travel through. That goes without mentioning what everyone else has commented on, like traffic matters. Personally, I have a daughter who attends an elementary school and traffic in the mornings during school hours is exuberantly heavy in this area since it travels... well, it would be in three sectors: Seco Mines, Deer Run and we all have to access the city to pick up our little ones whether it is the schools nearby or the older ones that already attend high school, you have to travel through this area, which would be Rio Boulevard to access them because the roads are very limited to enter Eagle Pass because the city was very small but it has been drastically growing in population in the last few years. So, I vehemently think that it would be harmful regarding not only to our health, but also to our daily life and the personal development of each one of us. Thank you.

Alan Belniak 1:02:02

Okay... muchas gracias. Before we get to another person in the room, I do see another hand raised that's in our virtual audience. And that is Juanita Martinez. Juanita, you should now have the option to unmute your microphone. And if you could, like the others, state your name, spell your name, and then speak slowly and clearly and loudly for our interpreter. Thank you.

Comment 13 - Juanita Martinez 1:02:31

Yes, I'm Juanita Martinez. I'm a citizen here in Maverick County, I'm an activist mostly. And, you know, there's a big elephant in the room here. Now, you're listening to concerns and there are many, we were formally involved in getting rid of a coal mining project that we felt was detrimental to the elementary school, which was just a mile away from there. Anyway, the big elephant in the room is how long has this project been worked on by some elected officials, by you all, and we are barely hearing about it? How long has this project been in the works? And, you know, that normal citizens like myself, had no idea that this was happening, normal citizens that live in the area, they're going to be so affected. It was kept from them. And what, officials... what elected officials were involved in this, you know, in the planning of this project? The citizens have a right to know and why was it kept from citizens like all those and all those very substantive, substantial concerns and very logical reasons why this should not go forward? So, I'm just curious about that and I'm listening to everybody and it's just, I'm wondering, you know, is this just for show? Is it already a done deal? Like some people are saying or do we have a say so, do we pick up a petition, do we get signatures? You know, they have a right and they had a right to know a long time ago when you all started working on this project with some elected officials, which is what I hear. So thank you for listening to me, I am here. And like I said, it's just out of concern. Thank you very much.

Alan Belniak 1:04:48

Thank you, Juanita. Appreciate your comments. Okay, um, all right. So now we're back to our group of people in the room. And just before the next speaker, if you could let me know, just so we have a bearing because our folks on the digital side here, we don't know how many people are there or how many people would like to speak so if you could just let us know that that would be helpful. And as you bring up the next person, just like before, please speak loudly, clearly, slowly and state and spell your name and you'll have three minutes.

Comment 14 - Roger Gonzalez 1:05:27

Hello, my name is Roger Gonzalez, and I am here to express my opposition to this project. First, because it represents a hazard to our health. Anywhere where a railroad is, is a respiratory and cancer producing ambient. Second, it is very close to our Seco Creek, which will, in an event of a spill or an accident or a derailment, any chemicals will go straight back into our Rio Grande area, and very, very close to our water supply system. I humbly ask you to consider these concerns. Also, we moved into this area three years ago in hopes of living in a place where we would have... would be quiet, where our children can grow up without any problems with air contamination. I'm also worried about plummeting values on our homes, damage to our homes, and the constant noise and visual impacts in our area. We live 400 yards or less from the proposed crossing and we are definitely opposed to this project. Thank you very much for your time.

Alan Belniak 1:07:24

Thank you, sir. Okay, next in the room, and if you could let us know approximately how many people are remaining to speak that would be helpful for us.

Pedro Sanchez 1:07:39

I believe there's approximately three more people left to speak after myself.

Alan Belniak 1:07:44

Okay, thank you very much sir. If you could just state and spell your name and you'll have three minutes like everyone else.

Comment 15 - Pedro Sanchez 1:07:51

Yes, I'm Pedro Sanchez. Common spelling on Pedro, P-E-D-R-O. And common spelling on Sanchez, S-A-N-C-H-E-Z. I live in the Bass Subdivision 2353 Darlene Street, to be exact. I too as well have just been made aware, I would say, as of last week on Wednesday, of this project. As far as what I can see here on the maps that have been shown, it would be running directly behind my property. Also, as of Monday, I... there was marks made six feet into my property at the very front of my property and at the very rear my property. Nobody made contact with me, nobody tried. My neighbor just advised me that there were several construction workers out there. They thought maybe I had called them out there to get my fence started. But I'm thinking it's in reference to this project that's been proposed for the... it's in the process. But yeah, that... I'm just voicing my concern. And also, just like everybody else that spoken as far as the quality of life because of the noise that would be directly behind our house. Like they previously stated, it is located in a in a federally recognized flood zone already, which nothing is to be constructed especially of that magnitude already on. But yeah, like I said, I'm just voicing my concern that I'm obviously opposed for this project, as far as are the concerns being raised, when would they be addressed? Would this be like in a separate meeting or...?

Alan Belniak 1:10:00

Pedro, this is just a comment offering session. If you follow the links on the screen, or that we've shared before, this is one part of the process. There will be subsequent

communications after this.

Pedro Sanchez 1:10:12

Got you and it's currently being documented, like these concerns that are being raised. Okay. That's it. I appreciate your time.

Alan Belniak 1:10:25

Okay. Thank you, Pedro. Appreciate your comments. And if we could go to the next person in the room, please. Also just want to express my sincere thank you to our interpreter, who when we have a member of the audience speaking in Spanish on this line, she is wonderfully speaking in English on our other line. So, thank you very much for doing that, Cecilia. So, with that next person in the room, please.

Gabriella Maldonado 1:10:51

My name is Gabriella Maldonado.

Alan Belniak 1:10:57

Can you hear me? Oh, yes, we are. Yes, we can. If you could just speak up just a little bit. That would be helpful.

Comment 16 - Gabriella Maldonado 1:11:04

Okay, my name is Gabriella Maldonado and I live on Kiosko Street, a block and a half away from the proposed bridge and like two blocks away from the railroad. I oppose to that, for the area. It's... we are a family united community, and this is going to disturb our peace. And it can be taken out of the city and out of the people's life, outside of the country. There's a lot of country that can use. I oppose, thank you.

Alan Belniak 1:11:45

Thank you for your comments. Okay, actually, we do have another new hand raised on virtually so folks in the room, I'll come back to you in just one moment. I'd like to recognize Ricardo Sanchez in our virtual audience. Ricardo, you should now have the ability to unmute your microphone and like others before you if you could just state and spell your name and speak clearly and slowly and you will have a fresh three minutes.

Ricardo Sanchez 1:12:18

Yes, thank you very much. Good evening, my name is Ricardo Sanchez. Ricardo, R-I-C-A-R-D-O. Sanchez, S-A-N-C-H-E-Z.

Alan Belniak 1:12:27

Thank you.

Comment 17 - Ricardo Sanchez 1:12:29

Yes. So, I am very frustrated with this proposed plan and of course I oppose it. I actually live on Rio Pecos, which is approximately 200 yards where this proposal is wanting to be built. I just want to go on record saying that I am very against this and if this were to go, I feel that there's already traffic being congested over here, because they're already starting to build new neighborhoods and these streets are very narrow. There needs to be a plan, or it has to be easier for us to come in and out. At the end of this... at the end of the day, this is a very quiet and peaceful neighborhood and we want to continue it that way and especially it being so close and having to be living through this for the next couple of years, I do not see that this is a very good idea, especially as a person who lives right in front of... that they will be building in front of my house. And so that's all the concerns. I would like to voice out. I do appreciate your time.

Alan Belniak 1:13:34

Thank you, Ricardo. Appreciate your comments. And okay, now I believe we're going to return to the few remaining folks in the room who would like to speak.

Comment 18 - Marcos Mendoza 1:13:46

Yes, my name is Marcos Mendoza, M-A-R-C-O-S, M-E-N-D-O-Z-A. And I oppose this project for a couple of reasons: the air quality, the water quality, that the hazardous materials can contaminate our river, if a possibility of a spill or an accident or flood or something. Those are the reasons I oppose please, please take it in consideration. Thank you.

Alan Belniak 1:14:24

Thank you very much for your comments and we can still continue with anyone left in the room.

Audience Member 1:14:32

Does anybody else want to speak? So, we have one more who's coming up he's coming.

Alan Belniak 1:14:37

Okay, thank you for letting us know.

Comment 19 - Joaquin Maldonado 1:14:44

Hello, my name is Joaquin Maldonado, J-O-A-Q-U-I-N, M-A-L-D-O-N-A-D-O. I live in a [inaudible] in Seco Road. I live all my life here. I was born here, and I'm opposed for this project because of the water quality and where it's being built here next to the Seco Creek. That is going to cause a lot of environment issues in the future because of the rail and I hope that it doesn't go through because, you know, I love my community, I know it's going, and is it's going to go a lot more, but for those projects, I think they need to go outside of the County and city limits. And like, the other lady said, we weren't advised when they were making this budget, we barely found out, you know, and that's why we oppose of it. I oppose of it and I hope that it doesn't go through. And that's about it, you know, and I hope, you know, somebody else does something for this. And I approve that people come and invest in Eagle Pass, but not in our community or residents, they can go outside, you know, the city limits and

county and whatever and we approve of it, but not here where we already have residents living for whole life, you know, and for this to come in our neighborhood, you know, is that and... for me, it's not good so, I oppose this. So, thank you for hearing me.

Alan Belniak 1:16:21

Okay, thank you for that. Alright, scanning our list. I do not see any more hands raised for our virtual participants. And if you in the room can confirm, is there anyone else left to speak? Just want to make sure we've given everyone the opportunity.

Audience Member 1:16:39

Yes, that's everybody in the room. Okay, very much appreciate your patience.

Alan Belniak 1:16:45

And thank you for helping to facilitate that. Obviously, it was a bit of a new thing for us and a challenge so really appreciate you kind of helping manage that. So, very helpful, so, thanks. I do see another hand raised, Mireya Ovideo, I believe you spoke earlier. Did you have anything new to offer?

Comment 9 (additional) - Mireya Oviedo 1:17:11

(Original comment in Spanish. This is an English translation)

Yes, very good evening. My name is Mireya Oviedo. I just said something in English, but my native language is Spanish. I would like to communicate in this language to voice some of my concerns about this project. The project that is being submitted for the City of Eagle Pass I think is not a project that is justified since Eagle Pass does not have the financial infrastructure or enough means for such a big risk as this railroad that is being presented to us. Also, the authorities did not inform us about the list of chemicals that they propose would travel through the City of Eagle Pass or Piedras Negras. We don't keep into account a list of chemicals that, really, every chemical introduced brings a cause and an effect both in the short and long run. We have talked about the short-term causes, which could be irritability, allergic consequences, but we have not considered the long-term effects, which include very serious illnesses like cancer, leukemia, effects on pregnant women. We also see that our town's structure has rivers and channels, since the Rio Bravo is very close. The properties around our location would be affected value-wise. People here have worked very hard to maintain their properties, to pay taxes, and move forward as the united town that we are. I don't think we need this project to move forward or to obtain a benefit for the residents of Eagle Pass. Thank you very much.

Alan Belniak 1:19:13

Muchas gracias, tambien. Okay. alright, so with that, Andrea, I do not see any more hands raised. So, I believe that concludes the opportunities here for folks to remain to give comments. So, I turn it back to you to close us out for the evening and share any remaining comments.

Andrea Poole 1:19:42

There we go. Yes, thank you so much, everybody for coming out this evening and sharing your concerns with us. This is the very beginning of our environmental analysis process. I'd like to reiterate that we are taking your concerns. And then we will draft our scope of study and evaluate the environmental impacts of the issues that you've raised, and we will share our analysis with you. I really appreciate the comments that we've received tonight, and we will continue our public outreach so that we can keep you informed as we move along. And if you have any additional comments that you would like to leave with us, the chat information is available, as well as the website and the information on how to leave a comment for the Board. And it doesn't matter how you provide your comments, we will consider them all equally. So, thank you so much. Are there any last chance speakers before I bid everyone a good night?

Alan Belniak 1:21:05

Scanning our list? I do not see any more hands raised hands.

Andrea Poole 1:21:09

All right, well, thank you all so much and you have a great evening. We really appreciate you making the time and sharing your concerns with us tonight.

Alan Belniak 1:21:19

Thank you, everyone.