

NOTICE OF PREPARATION  
of an  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT  
for the  
NORTH COAST RAILROAD AUTHORITY RUSSIAN RIVER DIVISION FREIGHT  
RAIL PROJECT

The North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA), headquartered in Mendocino County, will be preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the North Coast Railroad Authority Russian River Division Freight Rail Project (Project). NCRA has proposed this project to resume freight rail service along a 142-mile corridor from Willits, Mendocino County southward to Lombard, Napa County. The rail corridor, commonly known as the Northwestern Pacific Railroad (NWP), generally parallels US 101 running north-south in Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties. In Novato, Marin County, the rail corridor turns east and runs along California Highways 37 and 121 to Lombard, Napa County. Freight service will not extend south of the US 101 interchange with California Highway 37. Additionally, this project does not propose nor authorize freight service north of Willits.

Mendocino, Sonoma, Marin, and Napa counties are located on the west coast of California north of San Francisco. In Mendocino County, the incorporated local jurisdictions in the proposed project corridor include the Cities of Willits and Ukiah. In Sonoma County, the incorporated local jurisdictions in the proposed project corridor include the Cities of Cloverdale, Healdsburg, Windsor, Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati and Petaluma. In Marin County, the incorporated local jurisdiction in the project corridor includes the City of Novato. The Napa County portion of the project does not traverse any city boundaries and is completely in unincorporated County lands.

NWP Co., NCRA's selected rail operator, proposes to resume the operations of freight service in the rail corridor from Willits to Lombard for transport of general freight to serve the communities in the rail corridor. In this rail corridor, NWP Co. could also transport solid waste to landfills beyond the four-county area, replacing the truck hauling currently used for this service. The project does not propose the transport of hazardous waste, dangerous, highly flammable or explosive material. This area has historically been serviced by the railroad and this project will reestablish reliable and cost effective service to the businesses and public utility entities within the service area, and resumes service to former customers whose businesses have been adversely impacted by the lack of service.

The need for a cost-efficient, alternative method of transportation to deliver commercial goods and freight in the area is supported by:

- Capacity constraints on existing systems, particularly U.S. and CA Highways 101, 121, 37, and 12 that result in travel delays and congestion. The rail service would remove a portion of the current commercial truck traffic on the roadways thus reducing traffic congestion "Depending on the density of the commodity, one railcar may move the same weight or volume as four or five trucks."

Freight-Rail Bottom Line Report, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, January 2003, p. 26)

- Increasing unreliability and safety concerns of existing travel modes due to congestion, inclement weather, and accidents. A reduction in the number of commercial trucks on the local roadways will result in increased safety on the roads.
- The absence of four-lane highways and freeways connecting U.S. Highway 101 with Interstate Highway 80.
- By removing a portion of the current commercial (freight including solid waste) truck traffic on the roadways, rail service would decrease diesel emissions from trucks, resulting in a net improvement in air quality and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Movement of freight on rail is measurably more efficient. One ton of goods can be moved more than 400 miles with one gallon of fuel according to the Association of American Railroads' Railroad Facts, 2003 Edition.

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide efficient, reliable, and cost-effective rail service in Mendocino, Sonoma, Marin, and Napa counties. The following project objectives have been identified to achieve this goal:

- Provide an alternative transportation option to trucking for commercial freight across the four-County area.
- Provide an alternative transportation option to trucking for hauling solid waste across the four-county area.
- Provide an alternative cost-effective option to the disposal of solid waste in local landfills.
- Fulfill the State mandate to provide the continuation of railroad service to Northwestern California and help alleviate the growing concerns for efficient goods movement.

An Initial Study has been prepared in order to address potential impacts associated with the proposed project, which includes operations and features supporting operations. The Initial Study is attached to this Notice of Preparation, and contains the following: a project description; a map showing the location of the project, the potential environmental impacts associated with the project; and mitigation measures to reduce impacts to less than significant levels. In summary, potential significant environmental impacts associated with the project have been identified, and therefore, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be prepared under CEQA.

Pursuant to State and local guidelines implementing the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), please be advised that the NCRA will be the Lead Agency for the





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**PROJECT LOCATION**

NORTH COAST RAILROAD AUTHORITY  
 RUSSIAN RIVER DIVISION  
 FREIGHT RAIL PROJECT

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