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NET RMA Announces \$15 Million Economic Development Project for Rusk County Rural Rail District

Federal grant and public-private partnership funding to expand and modernize Henderson Overton Branch freight rail line, create hundreds of jobs

(Henderson, TX) – The Rusk County Rural Rail District (RCRRD), in collaboration with the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA) is announcing a significant infrastructure development project, totaling \$15+ million, aimed at revitalizing the Henderson Overton Branch (HOB) rail line. This needed infrastructure project, which is facilitated by an \$8.48 million federal grant and matching funds from private partners, represents a major investment in the economic future of Rusk County.

"Rusk County is seizing its future by transforming an aging rail line into a vibrant economic artery," said John Cloutier, President of the Rusk County Rural Rail District. "This bold step is a testament to our commitment to replacing the county's primary resources and driving economic growth through strategic infrastructure investments."

Economic Development and Job Creation

This investment is expected to spur significant economic development and job growth in the region. The recent \$250 million expansion of the West Fraser timber mill in Rusk County is a prime example of how improved rail access can attract substantial industrial investment.

"Our rail traffic has increased tenfold, and we anticipate even greater growth once the project is completed," added Cloutier. "This development not only creates hundreds of jobs but also positions Rusk County as a key industrial hub in East Texas."

Support from NET RMA

A key part of the requirements for the \$8.48 Million FRA Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant was to show evidence of local support. NET RMA provided that in 2020 with a \$240,000 grant for improvements on the Henderson Overton Branch rail line.

"This \$15+ million project is a direct result of NET RMA's commitment to fostering economic development in East Texas rural communities," said Glenn Green, Executive Director of NET RMA. "By investing in this rail line, we are not just building infrastructure but we are also building a better future for Rusk County and the surrounding areas."



Project Details

The project includes extensive upgrades to the rail line and modernizing the connection to the Union Pacific mainline. These enhancements are designed to support the growing industrial activities in the region and improve the overall efficiency of rail operations.

Key highlights of the project include:

- Rebuilding transload zones: Enhancements in Overton and Henderson to support increased industrial activity.
- Increasing track capacity: Expanding track splits to accommodate more rail traffic.
- Modernizing connections: Upgrading the switch to the Union Pacific mainline, which has not been modernized in over a century.

About Rusk County Rural Rail District

The Rusk County Rural Rail District owns the Henderson Overton Branch (HOB) rail corridor. The HOB, leased to and operated by Blacklands Railroad, runs for almost 14 miles from Henderson to Overton where it interchanges with Union Pacific. The railroad serves multiple customers and commodities including asphalt, scrap, lumber, frac sand, aggregate, and chemicals.

About the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET RMA)

The NET RMA is an independent government agency created to accelerate the development of transportation projects in Northeast Texas. The agency's mission is in cooperation with its regional partners to provide solutions to expedite infrastructure and mobility projects that will improve the quality of life, enhance the regional economy and assure efficient mobility in the North East Texas Region. The NET RMA is governed by a 21-member board of directors that represents each of the 14-member counties: Bowie, Camp, Cass, Cherokee, Gregg, Harrison, Kaufman, Panola, Rusk, Smith, Titus, Upshur, Van Zandt and Wood. Texas RMAs were made possible through an initiative passed by the State Legislature in 2001. The NET RMA was established in October 2004. For more information, visit NETRMA.org.

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