

For Immediate Release

July 17, 2014

CONNECT OREGON COAL AND OIL SUBSIDIES 'AN AFFRONT' TO OREGONIANS

Transportation projects wrongly presume controversial coal export and crude oil proposals would be built even as they undergo intense scrutiny and permitting delays

Salem, OR - The Oregon Transportation Commission today is [hearing](#) public input on three publicly funded projects for the sole benefit of controversial proposals to export dirty coal and increase rail shipments of explosive crude oil. Proposals to expand Port Westward Beaver dock and upgrade rail infrastructure in the town of Rainier would cost \$7 million, or one of every six dollars (16.7%) of the \$42 million ConnectOregon transportation fund.

A diverse showing of local elected officials, residents from rail line communities, fishermen, and health professionals will be expressing their opposition to the projects. The projects don't meet ConnectOregon's own "public benefit" standard or a standard to improve the state's overall transportation efficiency. The Rainier rail "fix" could actually put the town in more danger and all three projects wrongly presume that coal export and a permit for expanded oil transport would be approved.

"We are still in the early stages of evaluating these proposals, yet we could wind up spending millions of public dollars before any decisions have been made," said Jeremy Ferguson, Mayor of Milwaukie. "This is an affront to Oregonians who could suffer the health, safety and economic impacts from these projects."

"Safety is my number one concern. Even one incident could be catastrophic to communities in the vicinity, and an economic catastrophe to the entire region," said State Representative Lew Frederick, representing North and Northeast Portland. "I am not convinced that the necessary precautions are keeping pace with the drive to feed this market."

In a June 19, 2014 [letter](#) Columbia River Keepers said the projects "would not 'connect Oregon,' but divide it. . . further impairing transportation connectivity for ordinary Oregonians and jeopardizing the safety of anyone living or working near these dangerous oil trains."

The letter also challenges assertions made in the project applications that necessary permits do not require extensive reviews and that construction can begin right away. The letter says "environmental reviews have only just begun and will likely take up to two years to complete." Even a rail advisory committee that evaluated the Rainier rail project [acknowledged](#) (page 7) that "Timing on this project is quite a ways out and would take funding away from shovel ready projects."

Recent explosive oil train derailments should prompt re-evaluation of Rainier rail "fix."

In its evaluation of the Rainer project a rail advisory committee [conceded](#) (page 7) it is "a fix, not a solution." By increasing the speed of trains from 10 mph to 25 mph and allowing more oil trains through the middle of downtown Rainier, the project could actually make the situation more dangerous, not less.

“The safety emergency is real, but it was created by the Port and Global Partners to bring hundred-car trains full of explosive crude oil through Columbia County in unsafe tank cars on unsafe tracks,” said Darrel Whipple, a retired elementary school teacher who has lived near Rainier for 44 years. “This is an impossible situation being forced on the community by the Port and its grandiose scheme for coal and oil export.”

Safety concerns have heightened with the recent huge increase in oil train traffic and [string](#) of explosive derailments, including:

- In July, 2013 forty-seven people were killed when a crude oil train derailed in a small town in Canada’s Quebec Province just across the border from Maine.
- Multiple explosions sent mushroom clouds of flames hundreds of feet into the air when a 106-car crude oil train derailed in Casselton, North Dakota in December 2013.
- In April 2014 a derailed train sent burning crude oil into the James River in Lynchburg, Virginia. “The river was on fire,” [said](#) deputy city manager Bonnie Syrcek. “We are very fortunate that the cars that derailed toward the river, instead of toward the city.”

The proposed expansion of the Port Westward dock would rely on matching funds from project developer Ambre Energy, a company with a poor business record and financial [standing](#), including \$124 million in accumulated losses since it began in 2005 and failure on its only coal mining venture in Australia.

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