

For Immediate Release

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CONNECT OREGON: PRAISED FOR DENYING COAL DOCK WORK BUT CRITICIZED FOR APPROVING MORE DANGEROUS OIL TRAINS

Salem, OR - The Oregon Transportation Commission today denied funding for a project to expand Port Westward Beaver dock for coal export but approved two projects for expanded oil transport: an upgrade to a different Port Westward berth and rail infrastructure in the town of Rainier. Denial of the project for coal is another blow to the proposed Morrow Pacific terminal. The Dept. of State Lands decided to [deny](#) a key permit for the proposal earlier this week.

“We’re pleased that coal export will not receive a public subsidy from Oregon. Of course, our state should not fund dirty coal that harms our health and our river. In the same respect, it makes no sense that the Commission gave state dollars to subsidize crude oil-by-rail. As a City Councilor, I have a responsibility to protect the health and safety of residents of Hood River. Increasing the number and speed of crude oil trains will dramatically increase threats to our people and property from fires and explosions,” said Hood River Council Member Kate McBride.

Nearly three dozen local elected officials asked Governor Kitzhaber to deny all three projects in an Aug. 7th [letter](#). Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Multnomah County Commissioner Jules Bailey also urged Governor Kitzhaber not to subsidize oil and coal in a separate letter on Aug. 6th. Opposition to the projects also includes fishermen, health professionals and local residents in communities along the rail line.

“Coal export is as unpopular in Columbia County as it is in the Columbia Gorge and Portland. It will bring no true benefit to our county, while reaping huge profits for Ambre Energy, the Australian company that wants to sell US coal to China. So we’re happy about this part of the OTC decision. It’s disappointing, however, that the OTC is using public money to fund oil-by-rail. There are huge safety concerns that must be addressed immediately. With this action, the OTC has just given a green light to increased speed and number of explosive Bakken crude oil trains traveling through our communities,” said Darrel Whipple, a retired elementary school teacher who has lived near Rainier for 44 years.

In a June 19, 2014 coalition [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.”

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.

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.”

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