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September 28, 2016

Wasco County Board of County Commissioners  
511 Washington St. Room 302  
The Dalles, OR 97058

Subj: Union Pacific application, rail siding extension. cc

Dear Honorable Commissioners Rod Runyon, Steve Kramer, Scott Hege:

We are writing to ask that the application of a siding extension proposed for the Mosier area by the Union Pacific Railroad Company be rejected when it comes before the County Commission after receiving approval by the Wasco County Planning Commission on September 26 of the current year.

My wife and I attended that session and found the process by which the commission considered the application to be confusing and unsatisfactory. Not only were applicant's representatives accommodated in preferential front-tier seating in the room, but the process seemed to be prejudicially hampered as the commissioners had to read the company's post-deadline amendments for the first time, requiring a half-hour from actual deliberations over an application they had never seen.

This, on its face, appeared to be prejudicial to the process, and community residents and other interested parties were not allowed to view the new application, or comment on it in any way as the commission struggled through a difficult and chaotic discussion, often relying on the intervention of Planning Director, Ms. Brewer. Then, having labored for some time, the chairman decided to take a "straw vote" apparently to provide a preview of voting preferences of the commissioners. This odd turn of events then devolved into an entirely confusing cross-talking points about which no remonstrance was permitted from the audience, perhaps because the commissioners themselves were struggling to find the way forward.

Curiously, during the discussion, Director Brewer agreed with a questioning commissioner that the application essentially consisted of UPRR asserting the Planning Commission had no jurisdiction over their proposal at all. Amusingly, Commissioner Vicki Ashley declared in an emotional outburst that the process should proceed without displays of emotion. This had a certain calming effect on those in the room, allowing my wife and I to make a quiet exit into the bright afternoon sun of beautiful Wasco County and break for home.

As we were later to learn, the commission was able to reach a vote on the application, passing it on a 5 to 2 tally. However, we understand the application still faces several other hurdles---county commission review, treaty rights challenges, state park land issues, and so on. We hope these processes will not only be carefully and transparently conducted, but citizens will be allowed and encouraged to offer input.

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Note: As a matter of personal interest we suggest that the County consider requiring UPRR to meet community concerns about the risks posed by additional rail lines in this sensitive and nationally-recognized scenic area by posting sufficient bond against catastrophic events such as recently befell the city of Mosier when the railroad company reportedly failed to safely maintain its tracks, leading to a disastrous derailment and subsequent fire. This seems the *least* the County should do to fulfill its first obligation to protect life and property. Rail transport of highly dangerous cargo, passing through unprotected communities, home sites, forestlands and scenic areas increasingly places residents and important community assets at great risk.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

 PETER CLOUGH

Peter Clough and Jill Riebesehl

✓ Cc: Kathy White