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Citizens Concerned with Proposed Railroad Line

More than 100 people last week attended a spirited Las Animas meeting to debate a proposed \$1 billion railroad route that will pass through Bent County.

The railroad line — which would link with the exiting train tracks that pass through Las Animas — is intended to reduce railroad congestion in the metropolitan Denver area.

Currently 30 unit coal trains pass through the city each day and the proposal is to divert two dozen of them away from Denver and through a corridor in eastern Colorado instead.

Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is the point agency seeking to bring the new rail route into reality.

However, some farmers and ranchers in the audience expressed skepticism and alleged the railroad scenario was a covert attempt to ram through the controversial “Super Slab” highway that globalists envision as part of a large transportation link linking Mexico, the United States and Canada together more closely.

CDOT representative Randy Grauberger said the right-of-way would only be 150 feet wide most of the way, but would expand wider when tracks required more room due to terrain conditions.

He conceded the right of way might also be used for a pipeline and electric transmission lines as well. But Grauberger denied the right of way would include a highway.

The \$1 billion investment would supposedly save the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe and Union Pacific railroads up to \$5 billion due to more efficient operating costs.

However, the railroads have little money to put into the project, Grauberger said. Likewise, the state and other government agencies and banks are also strapped for cash.

So the proposed railroad route has drawn potential financial support from interests in Europe, including entities in Spain, Grauberger said.

That prompted one man in the audience to ask why foreign money would be invested in a U. S. infrastructure project.

Ann Kreutzer of Haswell also challenged Grauberger’s statement that the right of way would be only 150 feet.

She said a right of way map prepared by an engineering firm associated with the project shows the right of way is 660 feet as it passes right by her home.

After the meeting, Kreutzer said the right of way — and its potential transmission lines — pass next to her home while the expanse of prairie to the west of her home is devoid of homes entirely.

She asked why the railroad could not have been placed along section lines.

Kreutzer suggested the placement of the track was deliberately intended to be “disruptive.”

Other members of the audience asked where the funding for the railroad study came from.

When told it probably came from the state's share of the gasoline tax, they asked "Why?" when this was a rail project.

The representatives argued back that by moving the coal trains away from Denver an interurban railroad line could fill the void, carrying people along the Front Range from Pueblo in the South to Fort Collins in the North. This would in turn divert some traffic off of highways.

"We are still trying to determine if this economically feasible to do," Grauberger said.

"This is not a Ports to Plains issue," he added. The audience had raised that issue when it was noted that the citizen representative for the project committee was a man from Limon who is also a point man for Ports to Plains.

After the first session ended, CDOT governmental affairs spokesman Mickey Ferrell told the Democrat the railroad had been a "dynamic economic engine" for the Front Range communities.

"But times have changed," Ferrell said.

"Things are not going to be done the way they used to be."

A week earlier, three landowners called on the Bent County commissioners to express their concerns about the railroad plan, which they said would pass through their properties.

"The other communities say Bent County is all for it. I want to tell you some of the problems it will create," said Bobby Denton.

Denton also stated that the track would ultimately take a path 660 feet wide.

Denton said the proposed route would cut three of his sections in two, rendering them useless because water would be on one side of the track and grazing land on the other side.

Rancher Pat Karney said a related problem is that railroad crossings would be up to 10 to 15 miles away at some points along the route.

Gilbert Groves told commissioners the railroad tracks would affect his water supply also.

Karney said he has had dealings with the railroad in the past and "it is there way or no way."

Denton conceded he would be willing to sell his ranch outright for the right price — "but the right of way (only) would wreck it."

Commission Chairman Bill Long said he had Commissioner Lynden Gill had first heard about the railroad plan three years ago.

Long added that the railroad has not had the money to invest in it.

Denton said the state is not "doing a \$2 million study for nothing."

Long disagreed, noting that Xcel Energy had spent more than that on the proposed power plant for Bent County, then backed off from it.

"We will see that your concerns are addressed," Long said.

"We will not sit back and let this happen without voicing our opinion," Denton replied.

“We are interested in a project that is good for the county. But to say we favor a project that is good only for the railroad is inaccurate,” Long said.

When information was passed out to the commissioners, information that had been handed out at a meeting in Karval, Long commented:

“I do not believe everything that the railroad told us, just as I do not believe everything in this paper,” Long said, holding it up.

“This is worse than Pinon Canyon, They want to take just a piece of our land — but it is ruined,” Denton said during the earlier commission meeting.

After the special meeting in Las Animas, Bill Long said he believed that the proposed plan was for just a 150-foot wide right of way.

However, a few minutes later Kreutzer still expressed concerns that the proposal was tied into the Super Slab high concept. She said the Ports to Plains route was originally to have gone up U. S. 287 but she said that plan has been put on hold because now there is another route “farther to the west.”