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This is an op-ed letter which was published in the News Review and submitted to the Oregon Transportation Commission:

### WINCHESTER SWITCHYARD: ANOTHER LOST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Picture it: a sea of idling cars, boxed into each other, unable to move, work or do anything productive. We breathe exhaust fumes and listen to the radio about our troubled economy and the record unemployment rate. We're not in Portland or Seattle gridlock. We're in Roseburg.

We're waiting for a train.

One year ago, a new switchyard was going to be in Winchester, which would have dealt with this unwanted Roseburg tradition of counting train cars. The switchyard was planned, designed, property acquired, construction began and the project was 90 days from being completed, but the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) and the Governor were upset at the rail operator, Central Oregon and Pacific Railroad (CORP), for closing the short line from Eugene to Coos Bay, so they temporarily froze the switchyard's funding. After a year of reassuring us the money was safe, the OTC will vote to cancel the \$7 million grant this Wednesday at 3:10 p.m. in Salem.

Unfortunately, the debate between the OTC and CORP has lost sight of the big picture economic progress. They're like that slow and unending train we wait for, carelessly passing through town as if we aren't here. We're left watching, counting lost opportunity after another, and burning progress at zero miles per gallon. Cancelling this grant keeps us idling and unable to take advantage of present and future economic opportunity.

Last week, Congress agreed on a \$789 billion package to help stimulate the economy. The Oregon State Legislature has recently approved a similar economic stimulus bill for \$175 million. How much of this will Roseburg see? That's unknown. We estimate the stimulus is more likely to fund projects that are ready to bid in a very short timeframe. This means these stimulus projects will basically stimulate the maintenance of existing infrastructure. In other words, we're more likely to see short term projects with little or no long term consequence than the Winchester switchyard rail grant which would have provided tremendous economic benefits now and into the future.

The true economic stimulus for this region's rail was approved a year and a half ago when local businesses, local government agencies and subcommittees collaborated to assist the OTC in selecting the Winchester switchyard as the top priority in the state for the *ConnectOregon* grant. At the time, the OTC stated, "This project fosters benefits for the Roseburg community as trains will no longer be staged along the mainline in Roseburg, nor block public railroad-highway grade crossings. This will reduce traffic congestion in central Roseburg, improve emergency vehicle response times, improve air quality and reduce fuel consumption in the community."

The OTC and Governor were on board. They recognized how the switchyard, or its absence, would impact our economic conditions. For example, Roseburg Forest Products' (RFP) sensitive supply chain is dependent on efficient rail. When a lengthy train can't be broken up in a switchyard before entering a city, it moves inefficiently (with us watching), and shippers like RFP are forced to use the more expensive truck-delivery option. The switchyard grant would have resolved this by "providing a less expensive transportation alternative for the Oregon forest product industry, while reducing the growth of heavy truck trips on Oregon roads and highways." RFP recently laid off 100 local employees, in part due to increasing delivery costs. This makes me wonder what the number of jobs lost will be if the price of fuel is closer to what it was this last summer? It is troubling to us that the OTC changed course and is letting our economic conditions worsen because of their differences with CORP. Rail operators like CORP come and go, but the poor rail situation in Roseburg will always be here unless something is done. The switchyard is needed and the state needs to address this problem which directly impacts the flow of traffic on State Highway 138 with or without CORP in the picture.

However, we can be heard. If you're tired of waiting for the train to pass, missing another economic development opportunity that would result in job creation or if you're sick from breathing auto pollution, contact the OTC before their Wednesday meeting and offer your support of the switchyard by email: [patrick.j.cooney@odot.state.or.us](mailto:patrick.j.cooney@odot.state.or.us) or fax: 503-986-3432. The contact information for the Governor's Office is fax: 503-378-6827 and phone: 503-378-4582. Additionally, the City of Roseburg will host an informational meeting on this subject this Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers, 900 SE Douglas Avenue. Short presentations will be made by city officials, EMS personnel and members of the business community. You can submit letters of support at this meeting as well and I would be honored to personally deliver these messages to members of the OTC and the Governor.

Let your voice be heard.

Sincerely,

Eric Swanson

*Postscript - Unfortunately, the Oregon Transportation Commission voted to terminate the railroad switchyard grant.*