NORTH COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

of Monterey County

April 15, 2015

Honorable Debbie Arnold, Chair
San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors
County Government Center, Room D-430
San Luis Obispo, California 93408

Mr. Ken Topping, Chair
San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission
976 Osos Street, Room 200
San Luis Obispo, California 93401

Mr. James Bergman, Director
San Luis Obispo County Planning & Building Department
976 Osos Street, Room 200
San Luis Obispo, California 93401

Dear Chair Arnold, Chair Topping and Planning Director Bergman,

I am writing this letter to encourage the County of San Luis Obispo to consider the potential impacts to communities along rail corridors that lead into the proposed Phillips 66 Company Rail Spur Extension Project.

The North County Fire District provides fire, rescue and emergency services to the unincorporated areas of northern Monterey County. Within our response area are a major rail yard in the town of Pajaro, and approximately 15 miles of rail lines and spurs through several neighborhoods and the town of Castroville. We have received basic training regarding rail cars and locomotives. We are trained to the Haz-Mat operations level. But we do not have the training, equipment or resources to adequately respond to a major rail derailment, especially within the Elkhorn Slough.

The rail lines traverse through the Elkhorn Slough and during periods of high tide these tracks are under water. Trains stop and wait for the tide to lower before crossing. It has been reported by Monterey County Public Works that the tracks and adjacent road have subsided 12 inches in the past 10 years. We have been in discussions with Union Pacific, Monterey County and the Elkhorn Slough Preserve for over a year regarding the condition of these tracks in the Slough and what can be done to mitigate their subsidence and ensure their safety. To date, the Union Pacific has not acknowledged that the tracks could pose a possible risk.

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Given the potential for a disaster and the reluctance of the railroad and others to focus on prevention, and the fact that 40,000 residents would be immediately impacted if and when a rail disaster does occur, we would think at a minimum personnel, training, and equipment upgrades would be a requirement of any mitigation plan. The cost of providing emergency services to address a potential disaster should NOT be borne by the taxpayers of North Monterey County, but should be a cost to the railroad and or the shipper of the hazardous materials.

We are prepared to work with all of the entities to mitigate and prepare for this potential, but until that happens, the North County Fire Protection District is adamantly opposed to this plan of transporting hazardous materials via rail through our District.

This is not simply an issue for North Monterey County but in fact is an issue for every community in the path of this transportation corridor. We can and should do better to provide for the safety and wellbeing of our residents than what we are doing. I stand ready and willing to work towards a better and more prepared condition than we currently have.

I await your earliest response to this comment letter.

Sincerely,

Chris W. Orman, Fire Chief
831-214-5211 cell

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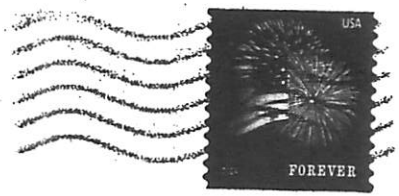

MR JAMES BERGMAN, Director
SLO County Planning & Building
976 OSOS ST, Rm 200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

93408