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S.L.O. PLAN & BLDG

FEBUARY 1, 2016
ATTN! S.L.O. County Planning Commissions
ATTENTION SUPERVIZER LYNN COMPTION AND BOARD OF S.L.O. SUPERVIZERS:

DEP. OF PLANNING & BUILDING CONSERNING PHILLIPS 66 PROPOSED RAIL SPUR PROJECT

MEETING & HEARING FOR FEB.4TH&5TH:

INCLOSED IS A ARTICLE FROM THE SUNDAY TRIEBUNE NEWS PAPER, WHICH I COULD NOT WRITE ANY BETTER DISCRIBING THE EXSTREAM DANGERS, POLLUTANT AND NOISE AND HARD SHIPS THE PASSING OF COUNTY PROJECT #DRC2012-00095 WOULD BRING TO THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AND YOUR CONSTITUANTS, WHO VOTED FOR YOU TO GOVERN ON OUR BEHALF

AND TO PROTECT US FROM THIS SO DANGEROUS A PROJECT, IF THIS PASSES YOU OR NO ONE WILL HAVE THE FUTURE CONTROLL OF THIS UN CAPPED INCREASES OF TRAINS PHILLIPS 66 WILL RUN.

THIS PROJECT WILL NOT ONLY INDANGER THE LIVES ALL OF US IN YOUR COUNTY BUT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE THREW OUT THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA, LET ME STRESS THE ONLY PARTY TO BENEFIT FROM PROJECT #DRC2012-00095 IS PHILLIPS 66 ,PLEASE END THE DANGER TO SO MANY PEOPLE AND NOT PASS OR GO FORWARD WITH THE PHILLIPS 66 RAIL SPUR PROJECT.

SINCERELY

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Alfreda Joan Phillips

FEBRUARY [illegible]

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EDITORIAL

Planners, reject Phillips 66 rail spur

BY THE TRIBUNE EDITORIAL BOARD

Good call, county planning. You are absolutely right to recommend rejection of Phillips 66 Co.'s application to build a rail spur at its Nipomo Mesa refinery.

The report lists several reasons for denial. Two stand out to us:

- Increased risk to public health and safety.
- A lack of benefits significant enough to outweigh the risks.

The risk to public safety extends far beyond the boundaries of San Luis Obispo County; every community along the various routes the oil trains could take is at increased risk.

Consider the history: Since oil production in North Dakota and Canada has taken off, shipments of crude by rail have increased. So have derailments, explosions and spills. Those include a 2013 derailment in Canada that killed 47 people.

What's more, oil trains may be especially susceptible to problems involving tracks. According to an October 2015 Los Angeles Times investigation into the causes of 31 oil train crashes, track problems were to blame in 59 percent — more than double the rate for ordinary freight trains. And it isn't necessarily old, worn-out tracks that are to blame; the Times report found that a 21-car derailment in western Pennsylvania — an accident blamed on rail failure — occurred on a new section of track.

The L.A. Times investigation raises fundamental questions about the cause of oil train derailments.

"Investigators and rail safety experts are looking at how the weight and movements of oil trains may be causing higher than expected track failures," says the report — a point raised by experts quoted in other recent publications.

Given that uncertainty, why are we even considering a project that would allow more train shipments of crude oil along our coastline?

That brings us to the second issue: Is there an overriding need for the rail spur?

Supporters says the project will protect the refinery's 200 jobs; that's listed as the No. 1 benefit on the website www.protectslojobs.com.

We agree 200 jobs are important. But are they truly in jeopardy? We have never heard Phillips 66 say it will shut down the refinery and eliminate 200 jobs or lay people off if its request is denied.

Nor have we heard the company say that it will use trucks to bring in crude oil if the project is turned down. Yet that's another point raised by project supporters.

"The rail extension would eliminate the potential need for up to 195 oil tanker trucks per day," says the supporters' website. It also claims rail is the "safest means of oil transport."

No mode of oil transport is without risk, but experts are in almost total agreement that when it comes to preventing fatalities and injuries, pipeline transport is the safest mode of transportation.

"Train transport spills far fewer barrels of oil," says a 2013 report in Scientific American, "but pipeline accidents tend to be more benign, if also more common. ... there hasn't been a fatality from a petroleum-related pipeline accident since 1999."

As we've said before, we support the Santa Maria refinery and hope it stays in business for many years to come, providing jobs, boosting the local economy and generating tax revenue for local government.

But we cannot support a project that would increase rail shipments of crude oil through communities in San Luis Obispo County, or any other county. There are too many risks and too many unanswered questions.

The county planning department conducted a thorough and thoughtful analysis of the project and reached the same conclusion. We strongly urge the county Planning Commission to follow its recommendation and reject Phillips 66's application for a rail spur.

If you go

The county Planning Commission hearing on the Phillips 66 rail spur application begins at 9 a.m. Thursday and continues Friday. Because a large turnout is expected, the meeting will be streamed live at the Fremont Theatre, where there will be overflow seating, near the County Government Center.

On Thursday, the meeting will begin with presentations from county staff and the applicant, and will be followed by comment from elected officials and public agency representatives; they should bring a business card and ID when they pick up speaker slips. The comment period for the public is scheduled to begin at 1:30 p.m. Thursday and could take several days. All speakers will be required to turn in a "request to speak" form.

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The end of a stretch of rail line inside the Phillips 66 refinery on the Nipomo Mesa is seen in this photo from March 2014.