

VIEWPOINT

Rail project is a risky endeavor with countywide ramifications

Folks living near the train tracks running through San Luis Obispo County should be alarmed about the oil super-train depot proposed for the Nipomo Mesa.

People in every school, home, church and business within earshot of the train tracks are being asked to double the risk they face from oil super-trains every day.

This project would double the amount of oil rolling through the county with vastly longer trains hauling far more volatile cargo — oil as dangerous as the Bakken crude that's been exploding with alarming frequency across the nation.

Think a roof collapsing under shamrock-bedazzled Cal Poly drunks is big news? Imagine the carnage at those student housing complexes just steps from the tracks if an oil train explodes.

Proponents of the rail depot project cavalierly dismiss the safety risks, even though we have no way of knowing how much of this explosive cargo is in any one car at any given time.

Google "oil bomb trains" to judge for yourself.

The entire county is being asked to place its well-being on a blackjack table dripping with explosive Canadian tar sand crude. Why double down on such a risky bet?

To benefit one company — Phillips 66 — promising the payoff of a whopping 12 permanent jobs in exchange.

The environmental and



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safety risks of this project extend far beyond the Nipomo Mesa. The "blast zone" radius of an exploding oil car is 1 mile,

according to ForestEthics.org, which is compiling oil super-train derailment data nationwide.

If this is even partially true, it remains that residents of every city in SLO County are affected, except Morro Bay. The only local city to weigh in so far — to oppose the project — is the city of San Luis Obispo, the most heavily populated.

City councils and elected community boards throughout SLO County owe their residents a clear assessment of the direct safety risks this project poses. Public safety is a fundamental responsibility of all elected officials.

And they, like the city of San Luis Obispo, should clearly state their positions on the project to the county Planning Commission, which is expected to schedule a hearing soon.

The SLO City Council has done its duty. The others should do theirs. Even if a local elected body supports the super-train depot, it should publicly explain why the promise of 12 jobs overrides the added risk to its town's safety.

We're not Appalachia, which has suffered oil train explosions due to lax regulatory oversight. Our county has a solid record of holding Big Oil accountable. It's time

to defend that record now.

In 1986, SLO County voters adopted Measure A, which still requires voter approval of permits issued by the county for onshore projects supporting offshore oil and gas development. Environmentalists joined the SLO Chamber of Commerce and tourism-related businesses to support Measure A, the last truly "bipartisan" coalition we've had.

Measure A was tested in 1988 by Shell Oil, which received permits for onshore pipelines and processing facilities — on the Nipomo Mesa — to support the offshore San Miguel Project. Voters soundly rejected the permits after one of the most costly campaigns in county history.

Today, we're faced with a variation on the same theme. This time, the onshore support facilities would be railroads and a depot accommodating mega-trains carrying explosive crude through communities up and down the length of our county, including the notoriously treacherous Cuesta Grade.

The trains would traverse the county five times a week, doubling the existing crude oil traffic. The provably dangerous content of these super-trains poses a far greater safety and environmental risk than any offshore project ever did.

If this crude were coming from the sea, voters would have final authority. If county planning commissioners and eventually the Board of Supervisors deign

to approve this mistake, the morally right thing to do would be to put it on the ballot.

Let Phillips 66 and its paid apostles try to convince a majority of county voters that twice as many oil bomb trains is good. As it stands now, all they need is three votes at the Planning Commission and three at the Board of Supervisors.

A ballot referendum would keep faith with the intent of the 1986 Measure A, which has withstood legal challenges up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Despite the rhetoric of its selectively blind supporters, the refinery won't be shut down if this project doesn't go through. Business will continue and no one will lose a job because of it.

This project isn't about the greater good. It's about the singular benefit to one multinational oil corporation at a cost of the safety of the entire population living along the rail line, representing the shank of SLO County's population.

The risk simply isn't worth it. It's a sucker's bet.

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they are still optimistic the plane will be found in the southern Indian Ocean where they suspect it

remains committed to the search, and hopeful that MH370 will be found." Foreign Minister Wang Yi of

expressed anger at many relatives who deemed it to be premature without any physical evidence of the crash.

Oil train derailment threatens Mississippi River

By CURTIS TATE
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — An oil train derailment and spill in northwest Illinois poses an "imminent and substantial danger" of contaminating the Mississippi River, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Saturday.

The spill from the derailment, which occurred Thursday, also threatens the Galena River — a tributary of the Mississippi — and the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, one of the most complex ecosystems in North America.

The EPA said it couldn't estimate how much oil was spilled, but that the 21 cars of the 105-car BNSF Railway train that derailed contained 630,000 gallons of Bakken crude from North Dakota. Small fires from the

TRAIN CARRYING CRUDE DERAILS IN ONTARIO

GOGAMA, Ontario (AP) — A CN Rail train carrying crude oil derailed early Saturday in northern Ontario, causing numerous tank cars to catch fire and spill into a local river system, officials said. It was the third CN oil train derailment in northern Ontario in less than a month, and the second in the same area. Ontario Provincial Police said no injuries were reported in the derailment that occurred at about 2:45 a.m.

wreckage continued to burn Saturday.

The safety of trains carrying flammable materials has become an issue as the introduction of new drilling technology has allowed the development of crude oil deposits far from traditional

pipelines, particularly in the Bakken formation in North Dakota. Rail has become the preferred way to transport that crude to refineries, with railroads moving about 500,000 carloads of oil last year, according to industry estimates, up from 9,500 in 2008. One tank car holds 30,000 gallons.

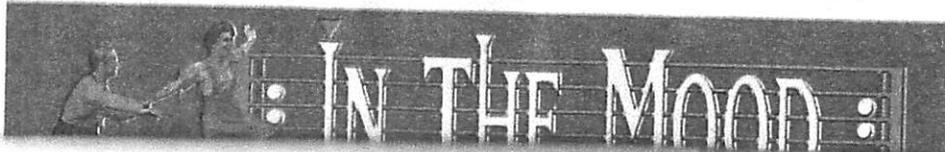
But recent derailments have cast doubt on the effectiveness of safety efforts and suggest that no tank car in service on the North American rail system is tough enough to resist damage in relatively low-speed derailments.

According to the Federal Railroad Administration, which is investigating the Illinois derailment, the train was traveling at just 23 mph when it left the tracks, well below the maximum speed allowed. The damaged tank

cars were newer CPC-1232 tank cars, which are supposed to be safer than previous ones, but have failed in at least four derailments this year, and at least two in 2014.

The Illinois derailment is the second in three weeks on U.S. rails. On Feb. 16, 28 cars of a 107-car CSX train derailed in Mount Carbon, W.Va., and 19 caught fire. One house was destroyed and more than 100 residents were evacuated. Many residents and first responders witnessed columns of fire rising hundreds of feet in the air as several of the tank cars ruptured from heat exposure.

In a statement Saturday, BNSF said a temporary road was being built to the Illinois site to help extinguish remaining fires and remove damaged cars.



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