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Feds looking for public input on Uinta Basin Railway, proposed route through Moffat County

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Clay Thorp

cthorp@CraigDailyPress.com



Utah's Seven County Infrastructure Coalition is considering a rail line that might pass through Moffat County.

Courtesy Photo

The federal Surface Transportation Board is seeking public comment for a new rail line that could connect Craig and Moffat County's energy industry to markets in Salt Lake City and beyond.

The agency held a public scoping meeting Tuesday night at Moffat County Fairgrounds Pavilion to begin the process of introducing the proposed project to Craig residents. The meeting offered perhaps the first glimpse of the Uinta Basin Railway – a proposed line that will end near Craig – but also served to determine who the stakeholders are, and what the range of impacts will be on air quality, wetlands, and recreation.

"The board has to consider the environmental impacts of construction," said Joshua Wayland, an environmental protection specialist with STB.

Wayland said his office has determined such impacts to the environment will be profound, so a thorough environmental review process is tantamount to the project's success.

"My office has made the determination that the project will have significant environmental impacts," Wayland said Tuesday.

In a notice of intent filed June 19 with the federal Surface Transportation Board, the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition in Utah announced it is considering a 185-mile stretch of railroad from Myton, Utah to Craig. The Craig route is one of two proposed alternative routes that would transport coal, crude oil, gilsonite, and other agricultural and mined products.

As about a dozen residents trickled into the scoping meeting Tuesday, Greg Miles said he wants Moffat County residents to know the rail will be good for business.

"The rail line is important for Moffat County to move their natural gas to the Jordan Cover (Energy) Project and it's equally important to our county," said Miles, a county commissioner for Duchesne County in Utah.

He added that the new rail line would bring more work to Moffat County.

Nick Charchalis, of the Charchalis Ranch, agreed that Craig and Moffat County would benefit from the project.

"This adds new life to this rail line, which if we don't add some new life to it, it could be bad," Charchalis said. "I think it's great."

Charchalis said Craig has always had the potential to benefit from its geographic location as a rural hub for commerce and other big business moving along U.S. Highway 40, and adding a new rail line could finally make Craig into that rural hub.

"We're located in a great spot here and we've never been able to take advantage of it," Charchalis said. "This will help."

Wayland said Tuesday's scoping meeting was the first of six meetings across the region to encourage public input. Once a draft of his environmental impact statement is issued, Wayland said STB will hold another series of meetings, followed by a third set of public meetings once a final environmental impact statement is issued.

Wayland said the process could take several years, but he didn't have a definite timeline on when the environmental review process would end.

"It's really impossible to say," Wayland said. "...it's our review process and we'll take as long as it takes to do a thorough job on our environmental review process. That being said, we are committed to moving forward expeditiously."

In a June 25 county commissioners meeting, Moffat County Commissioner Don Cook stated STB had not consulted with the county and lacked the experience to effectively manage the rail project.

"The board hasn't gotten together and approved a railroad in 50 years," Cook said. "...No one there has ever done this."

Wayland argued that STB does have recent examples of approving major rail projects, including the 2012 Tongue River railroad in Montana and the 2017 Great Lakes Basin Railroad in [Wisconsin](#), [Illinois](#), and [Indiana](#).

"It's a larger railroad project than typically proposed, but we are familiar and well versed in how this environmental review process works," Wayland said. "It's not done every day, but there are some recent examples."

Comments on the rail line can be submitted via mail to the following address:

Joshua Wayland
Surface Transportation Board
c/o 9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA, 22031
Attention: Environmental filing, Docket No. FD 36284

Comments can also be submitted electronically via the project website uintabasinrailwayeis.com or to the email address uinta.eis@icf.com.

