



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY**

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July 25, 2015

Board of Supervisors
County Government Center
1055 Monterey Street – Rm. 430
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

Re: Phillips '66 Rail Spur Project

Dear Supervisors:

The League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County has followed developments with regard to the Phillips '66 Rail Spur Project for the past several years, and would like to offer recommendations to you with regard to that project.

The project has proven to be highly controversial, eliciting concern and comment not only locally, but from across the state of California. This is due not so much to the immediate construction requirements of the project, but rather to the ultimate purpose and impact of the project on many areas throughout the state, in addition to our own local area.

The plan to increase the importation of crude oil by railcar from places such as North Dakota and Alberta, Canada, has many people concerned for their own and their community's safety. As has been reported, oil shipments by rail have increased by more than thirty times in just the past two to three years. This increase is a result of the tremendous upsurge in production of oil from the so-called Bakken formation in North Dakota and from the well-known "tar sands" of Alberta. Unfortunately, these two sources produce oil in formulations that, for one reason or another, are more volatile than other sources. Their great volume has also led to the pressing into service of almost all available tank cars for transport. Many of these tank cars are old and lack the safety features of more recently constructed cars. Some have been recalled out of virtual retirement. The result has

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The increase in oil shipments by rail, the volatility of the oil produced from these new sources, the use of old and vulnerable tanker cars to transport that oil, and the failure to upgrade infrastructure on our rail lines have combined to lead many in our community and elsewhere to oppose the rail spur project. The concern is that the increased activity resulting from the rail spur project will expose hundreds of thousands of persons and large areas of environmental sensitivity to greatly increased risk of accident and damage. This is true not only in San Luis Obispo County but also throughout much of the state of California.

The League cannot turn a blind eye to such concerns, nor can we ignore the great increase in rail accidents, property damage, and deaths that have occurred from rail accidents in recent years. Locally, we note that the main rail line through San Luis Obispo County is one of the windiest and steepest in the state; names such as Horseshoe Curve and Little Horseshoe in Stenner Creek Canyon attest to this situation. The railroad trestle over Stenner Creek built in 1894 appears still to have its original steel trusses and rivets. The railroad bridge over Arroyo Grande Creek has been a source of concern to rail safety experts for years. Similar bridges over San Luis Obispo and Pismo Creeks also present safety concerns.

These sites would all see regular, heavy oil train traffic should the rail spur project be approved. This is not even to mention the schools, hospitals, homes, and other buildings that lie along the rail line in San Miguel, Paso Robles, Templeton, Atascadero, San Luis Obispo, Pismo Beach, and Grover Beach that may be put at risk of disastrous damage from train accidents.

We believe that the serious local and statewide safety issues raised by the far-reaching impact of this project require that the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors insist upon full and enforceable mitigations for these risks before approving the project. We say “enforceable” because it is unclear that requiring structural studies and upgrades to bridges, trestles, and other infrastructure could actually be enforced by the County of San Luis Obispo, or if such a requirement would simply be ignored as outside of the purview of the county. The same is true of a requirement for speed limits for trains within the county. Can County authorities legally enforce such requirements for studies, upgrades, and speed limits if they were imposed? **If the County cannot enforce these requirements, we believe the project should not be approved but should be denied.**

The League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County shares the deep concerns of our communities at both the local and state level regarding this project and the risks to the public that it entails. We urge the greatest caution in proceeding. Your decision will have a significant impact far beyond our county as well as within it. Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Marguerite Bader
President