



Pismo Beach mayor will send letter opposing Phillips 66 rail line

Rail project would bring crude oil by train to Nipomo refinery

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Pismo Beach Mayor Shelly Higginbotham will join the list of individuals and agencies opposing the [Phillips 66 Co. rail spur project](#), after the City Council considered its official stance on the project Tuesday night.

The council initially considered sending a letter of concern to the county Planning Commission, rather than one officially opposing the project. At the urging of Councilwoman Sheila Blake and several members of the community, Higginbotham said she would revise the draft letter to one opposing the rail spur, and would make it from herself, rather than from the city of Pismo Beach.

She hinged her opposition however, on whether the Phillips 66 project's final [environmental impact report](#) would sufficiently address 11 unavoidable environmental impacts -- called Class 1 impacts -- found in the project's draft environmental report.

At an as-yet unscheduled public hearing, the [San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission](#) will determine whether Phillips 66 can add 1.3 miles of track to an existing rail spur at its Nipomo Mesa oil refinery. The project would add five parallel tracks and an unloading facility to accommodate as many as five trains with 80 tank cars per



week delivering crude oil for processing at the refinery. Those oil trains would pass through a portion of Pismo Beach.

For months, residents and outside groups have petitioned the Pismo Beach City Council to join the San Luis Obispo City Council in taking an official stance on the project. More than 40 public agencies or elected officials in California have penned letters or passed resolutions opposing Phillips 66's plan, including the city of San Luis Obispo.

In the draft letter, the council detailed its "concerns regarding the safety of oil trains passing through our city limits en route to the Santa Maria refinery," and urged the San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission to consider rail safety when evaluating the project:

"The continued increase in the transport of crude by rail combined with recent rail accidents involving oil spills and resulting fires, has served to heighten concerns about rail safety and adverse environmental impacts among many of our citizens," the draft letter read, in part.

[Other agencies have chosen to write letters of concern](#) regarding the project, without expressing outright opposition or support, including San Luis Coastal Unified School District Superintendent Eric Prater, the cities of Paso Robles and San Jose, the Goleta Water District and Santa Barbara County's First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal.

At Tuesday's meeting, Mayor pro tempore Ed Waage, Councilwoman Mary Ann Reiss and Higginbotham all initially supported writing a letter of concern rather than one in opposition (Councilman Erik Howell recused himself from the discussion because of the likelihood the project will eventually be appealed to the [California Coastal Commission](#), on which he sits).

Councilwoman Sheila Blake supported a stronger stance opposing the project.

"I think we need to do something a little bit more forceful than that," she said of the letter, asking to add the word "opposition" into the text.

After some discussion, Higginbotham suggested revising the final sentence to read: "We would like to add our opposition to the large number of cities citing 11 Class 1 environmental impacts, unless those impacts can be mitigated."

Blake supported the change, but Waage said he was hesitant to support the revision, because he felt the primary issue was rail safety and the health and safety of Pismo Beach residents, not the environmental impacts.

Because she felt there would not be a consensus, and in the interest of getting the letter to the county Planning Commission quickly, Higginbotham said she would CC the council members on the final letter, rather than going through the entire drafting process at the meeting.

With the new wording, Higginbotham will join the [San Luis Obispo City Council](#) as the only local officials officially opposing the project. The [Lucia Mar Unified Teachers Association](#) has also voiced its opposition to Phillips 66's proposal.