

Railroad Project Could See Stimulus Money

MOSES LAKE — The Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project expansion could receive a portion of a \$1.5 billion federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant.

As a result, several letters were sent by businesses, government entity and state legislators to the state Department of Transportation (DOT), supporting the project.

“The good news here, is there’s a lot of support here,” said Pat Boss, a spokesperson for the Northern Columbia Basin Railroad, on Tuesday. “I think what we’re seeing is people starting to view the Port of Moses Lake and the Grant County International Airport as a key manufacturing hub when you’re talking about Moses Lake being a potential site for a Boeing manufacturing site.”

The DOT is now applying for the grant. Grant County’s railroad project is among four in the state which meets the grant’s criteria, Boss said, citing information from the DOT.

The others projects are located in Vancouver, Wash., Tacoma, Wash., and in Grays Harbor County, Wash., he explained.

Locally, the entire Columbia Basin economy is helped when manufacturing jobs come to Moses Lake, Boss commented.

The \$1.5 billion federal grant comes in increments of \$20 million, he said.

Already, the Port of Moses Lake obtained \$2 million for the project from the state Legislature.

The project involves building a new rail portion to expand rail to the industrial park on the east side of the Grant County International Airport, adding a new rail portion around northern Moses Lake from Wheeler Road to the current line near Stratford Road and bettering a rail area from Moses Lake to the airport.

“This is a significant regional project that will have substantial positive economic development and freight mobility impacts to Eastern Washington,” stated Port of Moses Lake Commissioner David Plate. “Many people are beginning to realize the many benefits of this project, which is why so many letters of support are being sent to WSDOT.”

On Tuesday, Plate also spoke of the flexibility and the mobility of using rail.

He quoted railroad advertisements touting the efficiency of rail, which used words to the effect of “436 miles, moving 1 ton of freight on 1 gallon of diesel.”

“It’s efficient, green and not tearing up our roads by using tractor trailers,” Plate commented.

Better rail access was mentioned as one of the reasons why large companies didn’t locate in Grant County, according to Grant County EDC Executive Director Terry Brewer.

“Given the current debate about Boeing’s future in Washington state, Moses Lake would provide an excellent competitive in-state alternative for Boeing and other aerospace companies if this rail project is completed,” Brewer stated.

Columbia Basin Railroad President Brig Temple spoke of the “large tracts of available development land and the abundant supply of competitively priced hydroelectric power,” in Grant County.

“We believe that Moses Lake will be a strong competitor nationally for major industrial and manufacturing projects, especially if the Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project is funded and completed,” Temple stated.

Tim Kelly, the railroad’s chief operating officer, said they’re nearly completed with the permitting process through the Surface Transportation Board for the entire project.

President Barack Obama recently named the third member to the board, which means a full board will be able to review the project, Kelly said.

The projects involved with the TIGER grant range from \$20 million to \$300 million in size, he explained.

Nationwide, there’s not an equal division of the grant money among all states and there’s no guarantee each state will receive funds, Kelly said.

The DOT received support letters from the following people and groups, including: Windermere Real Estate/K-2 Realty LLC, Moses Lake Chamber of Commerce, Rep. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, Sen. Linda Evans Parlette, R-Wenatchee, Rep. Bruce Chander, R-Granger, Rep. David Taylor, R-Moxee, Rep. Charles Ross, R-Naches, Rep. Mike Armstrong, R-Wenatchee, Rep. Joel Kretz, R-Omak, City of Moses Lake, Rep. Cary Condotta, R-Wenatchee, Sen. Bob Morton, R-Orient, Rep. Larry Haler, R-Richland, Sen. Curtis King, R-Yakima, Grant County Economic Development Council, Sen. Janea Holmquist, R-Moses Lake, Sen. Jerome Delvin, R-Richland, Grant County Commission, Moses Lake Industries, Inc., Columbia Basin Railroad and Rep. Norm Johnson, R-Yakima.

- *Courtesy of Lynne Lynch; Columbia Basin Herald, Moses Lake, Washington*