



glenn boettcher
fire and rain

The Willamette Valley Rail Study Committee's proposed commuter train service may have been derailed permanently by red tape.

The proposal would add twice-daily runs between Eugene and Portland to supplement the Los Angeles-to-Seattle Coast Starlight, with intermediate stops at Albany, Salem, Woodburn and Oregon City.

Committee members had hoped to have the rail service operating by January, but Wednesday they learned of several

procedural hurdles which must first be cleared.

Formal agreements between Amtrak and the state transportation department will probably be completed this month, but the project is stalled until Amtrak can initiate negotiations with Southern Pacific Railroad.

Although Amtrak has agreed to supply the rolling stock and will operate the trains, Southern Pacific must concede right of way on its lines and the railroad unions must supply crews, according to federal law, before the project goes any further.

The transportation department, however, has established a 5-member task force to expedite the commuter service effort.

Jack Graham, the task force leader, says his group must first respond to questions and concerns voiced last month by the Legislative Emergency Board and the State Transportation committee members.

The emergency board last month reserved \$1 million in state funds to match \$5 million in federal funds for financing the 18-month trial project.

Graham says he anticipates few problems in satisfying

emergency board and transportation commission questions — the task force is to establish standards for judging success of the project and develop a method of determining its worthiness of future support-but negotiations with Southern Pacific and the railroad unions may be a problem.

Already the unions have reportedly criticized a state suggestion that the size of train crews be cut and schedules be altered to save money. Southern Pacific officials have also expressed concern that the commuter trains might interfere with scheduled freight runs.

However, at least one Amtrak official says if an agreement is reached with Southern Pacific, it may be able to begin the train service without a labor agreement.

But that shortcut may be the last hope for the commuter rail project.

Amtrak and transportation department officials both say state residents will be lucky if the new runs begin by April.

And that's the good news.

The bad news is that Amtrak officials expect massive fuel shortages next year, possibly as early as April or May.

If shortages establish demands for Amtrak equipment and service in other parts of the

country, an Amtrak official says Oregon's proposed Willamette Valley rail service is not a top priority.

Wire reports say the Carter administration's newest efforts to cut American fuel consumption may mean either raising gasoline taxes by as much as 50 cents per gallon or imposing some type of rationing.

Although studies of both options have yet to cross Pres. Carter's desk, aides say administration officials have indicated some form of gasoline-saving will be included in the 1981 fiscal budget, which will be sent to congress in January.

The wire reports say administration officials believe now is the time for such proposals because American are anxious to cut their dependency on foreign oil — particularly in light of the dismal situation in Iran.

But the crisis in Iran and the mood of Americans are not the only motivations behind this much-needed examination of ways to immediately cut our dependence on foreign oil supplies.

Treasury Secretary William Miller brought back from a recent 5-day trip through the Middle East a message from several of his Arab hosts — America must make additional efforts to curtail oil consumption.

The Arab oil officials have reportedly said they may have to cut oil production if no progress is made.

The Saudis recently made their request even more stringent.

Either the United States must take steps to soak up some of the profits of the oil companies — through a windfall profits tax — or they will increase prices.

Miller reportedly told Saudi officials that the United States would take "new undisclosed actions" to curtail oil consumption and relieve pressure on world oil prices.

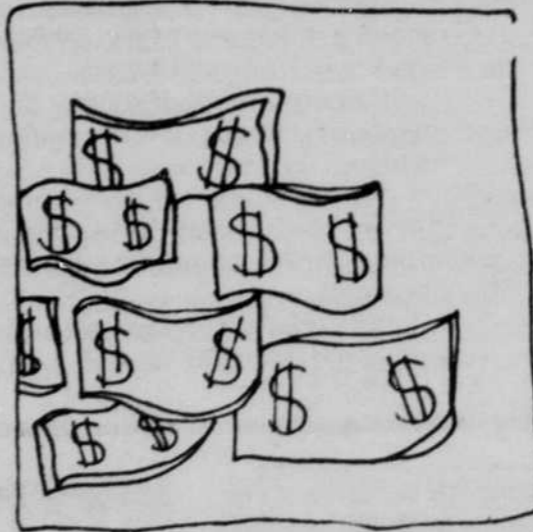
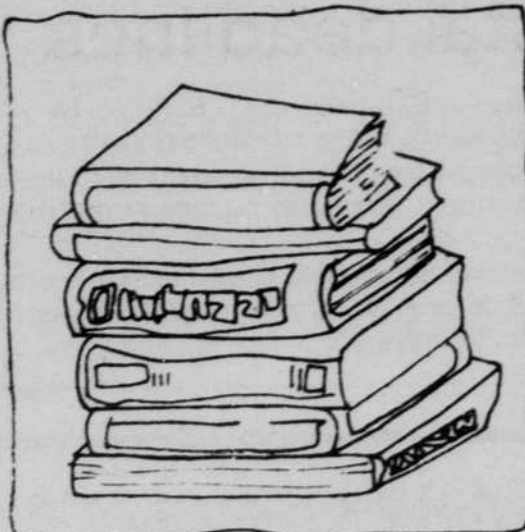
The windfall profits tax is having a hard time in the Senate, and now we may have gotten a sneak preview of what the new undisclosed actions are to be — rationing or a big tax, neither of which comes as any surprise.

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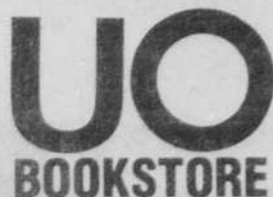
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