

East valley rail assessment underway

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STAYTON MAIL

Marion County has hired a consultant to conduct an economic assessment of the railroad line between Silverton and Stayton.

The East Marion Rail line is owned by Union Pacific and operated by Willamette Valley Railway, stretching from Woodburn to Stayton and passing through Mt. Angel, Silverton, Pratum, Macleay, Shaw, and Aumsville.

The line has been inactive between Silverton and Stayton since inclement weather in January of 2012 compromised the tracks.

Marion County Economic Development Coordinator Tom Hogue said that in recent years several groups have expressed an interest in seeing the line reactivated. Among them is Oregon Shipping Group, which contacted city officials in Stayton and Silverton this year regarding the line.

The county has contracted with Anzur Logistics, a Salem-based rail transportation consulting company, to conduct a study of the line, including an infrastructure assessment, market analysis and cost-benefit analysis.

According to Hogue, the contracted amount to pay for the study is \$29,856.

County officials said the objective is to “assist with the conversation and develop a common picture for all interested parties.”

The aim is informational.

“Marion County’s goal is to provide the underlying research and economic evaluation necessary as potential redevelopment opportunities are explored,” Hogue said. “We are not advocating for a particular outcome or project. The county’s role is to provide factual, neutral information beneficial to all parties as the future of the East Marion Rail line is discussed.”



Pratum Co-op is among the businesses that have been without Willamette Valley Railway service since early 2012, even though the co-op and its spur are on sturdy tracks well north of where inclement weather compromised the rail. JUSTIN MUCH | STAYTON MAIL

cussed.”

Hogue said Anzur will assess track conditions and provide an estimate of the cost to return the line to service. The group will also provide a cost-benefit analysis and potential funding sources.

The study will ultimately include an economic assessment for cities along the

rail line, Hogue added.

“Short line railroads are an important asset,” Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron said, “It’s important for the county to assess the economic impacts of rail service and ensure potential renewed service is utilized for the benefit of Marion County communities.”

Hogue said the assessment and evaluation project will begin immediately and the results are expected later this year. A final report is anticipated to be available for stakeholder review in January 2018.

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Siegmund Excavation deploys steep-slope technology

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In the fall of 2014 when Andrew Siegmund first witnessed steep-slope logging technology, it wasn’t exactly love at first sight.

Siegmund said Weyerhaeuser arranged for a New Zealand outfit to travel to Oregon and demonstrate the steep-slope timber harvesting it had developed.

“You know, I was intrigued, but I was cautiously skeptical,” said Siegmund, owner of Stayton-based Siegmund Excavation & Construction. “The mechanic side of me sees it and thinks, ‘If there is a breakdown and on the side of the hill ... That thing is 700 feet down the hill, and we’ve got to get parts down there to fix it.’”

On the other hand, the technology sure made quick work of traditionally arduous tasks tended in difficult and dangerous working conditions – and with a fraction of the labor.

“The more I researched it, the more I saw lots of opportunity here and how it served a niche,” Siegmund said.

There was also the roughly \$1.5 million price tag to consider.

Several generations of Siegmunds have been in the timber services business in Oregon, charged with tasks that include construction, building forest roads and general excavation. Andrew decided to make the investment.

Siegmund purchased steep-slope equipment from Technical Forest Solutions (TFS)

and has been using the harvesting equipment for 15 months; it appears to be on track with expectations. Perhaps even exceeding them, considering the boost it provided fighting fires in Santiam Canyon’s portion of Oregon’s torrid fire season.

“Siegmund’s steep-slope equipment was extremely useful in establishing fire line (in dicey areas),” said Brent O’Nion, Oregon Department of Forestry’s Whitewater Fire branch director. “It allowed us to get a fire line established in a very rapid manner; a job that normally would have taken days with the old-fashioned



Steep-slope technology at work in Oregon forests. JOHN CHOATE | OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

hand crews was accomplished in less than a day.

“It is a huge technological advance. It’s the first time I’d seen it in the fire line and it may be the first time used in fire suppression efforts in the U.S.”

Freres Lumber Co. of Lyons first approached Siegmund with the fire-fighting deployment idea at the Whitewater Fire, located east of Detroit. That was a new application for Siegmund and required a quick assessment.

“The timber manager for Freres Lumber Company, Todd Parker, called and asked us to bring a feller-buncher to cut trees on Freres timberlands where they were establishing a fire line for the Whitewater Fire,” Siegmund said. “Our tethered base machine was brought in to work in tandem with our steep slope harvester (feller-buncher). Dozers and hand-crews followed behind, getting it down to bare dirt, forming the fire line.”

It was not only of use, but the mechanization freed up crucial resources by

completing the fire line with a fraction of the labor in a fraction of the time as traditional methods.

“We’d typically have to approach this in two steps, the first being timber felling with timber fallers and then followed up by 20 to 40 people brushing and completing the hand line itself,” said John Tiltonson, an ODF timber management unit forester who worked onsite at the fire. “But in this case, it was one guy inside the cab of the steep slope machine doing most of the work, the hand crews only needed to clear the hand trail and minor amounts of brushing along the edge.”

Siegmund hopes that steep-slope equipment can be deployed for fire suppression in the future, and ultimately decrease the amount of damaged timberland.

This type of mechanized system is not new to flatter forest settings, such as those in the southern U.S.

“They’ve done a good job of mechanizing their harvest in the south so that’s

it’s rare for them to use a power saw or chainsaw that we do,” Siegmund said. “Here in the Northwest it’s difficult to mechanize it...with the terrain we have, there wasn’t a good way to get the equipment on the slopes.

“This is a method to overcome that. We’ve had the equipment for 15 months, and it’s worked continuously since. We’ve (harvested) 8 or 9 units, anywhere from one to three million board feet of timber in each unit.”

Siegmund was the first forest operation in Oregon to apply for and receive a variance from OR-OSHA to operate steep slope harvesting equipment. Andrew Siegmund estimates that about a dozen others have followed suit, and a total of about eight are currently operating statewide.

Siegmund sees the technology delivering raw timber more efficiently and safely to manufacturers, something that may fuse well with recent innovations, such as the vaunted cross-laminated timber or the Freres developed mass-plywood panel.

Siegmund acknowledges that steep-slope technology could shed some forest jobs through automation; it can harvest with four employees what has traditionally required eight to 12.

“I’ve heard from people saying, ‘Gosh you’re putting timber fallers out of work; you’re putting choker setters out of work,’” he related. “But really we’re not, because that’s an aging workforce; the pool of workers (for those forest jobs) is small.”

New technology, he believes, could develop other timber-related jobs in manufacturing and construction.

“Absolutely. That mass-panel plant Freres is building,” Siegmund cited as an example. “Quite honestly, that’s going to increase the volume of material they need. It will require more logs, more raw material, and this system is an efficient and more effective way to keep a steady supply to a firm like theirs.”

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OSAA

Continued from Page 1B

ministrator in the Silverton district.

In the latest proposal, five Salem-Keizer schools – McKay, McNary, South Salem, Sprague and West Salem – would be placed in a league with Bend schools Bend, Mountain View and Summit.

The final meeting of that committee is Sept. 25 at the Al Kader Shriners Center in Wilsonville. Days after that meeting, a final recommendation from the committee will be made. That recommendation will be voted on by the executive board on Oct. 16 and it will go to the delegate assembly that same day for approval.

Oregon is unique in that it has a democratic process.

Anyone from the public can – and many have – testify at the committee meetings and their opinions will be taken into consideration.

“In Alabama for reclassification they just do (attendance),” Younger said. “They say, ‘We have 300 schools so the top 50 is going to be 5A, the next 50 is going to be 4A, and then we’ll just make leagues from that.’”

Ultimately in Oregon the decision on which leagues and classifications each school is placed will be made based on

what is best for the schools as a whole.

“Who is hurt the least is basically what it’s going to come down to,” South Salem softball coach Scott McCormick said. “I know (the Bend schools) want to come here because it’s their easiest drive.”

All of the people who are part of the OSAA’s governance, at whatever level it is, are unpaid volunteers.

And as most are school administrators and their participation in these committees requires them to miss their jobs, they have to use sick time or vacation time in order to be part of it.

It’s more than leagues and trophies

A decade ago there was no public awareness of transgender athletes competing at the high school level.

And there was no OSAA policy about it.

So what happens when a transgender athlete wants to compete in softball at South Salem?

“I do not know what I’m going to do,” McCormick said. “It’s happening.”

It wasn’t until the summer of 2016 that the OSAA added rules regarding transgender participation in high school sports when it became a public issue that was brought to light in other states.

The policy lays out how certain trans-

gender students can participate on male or female teams while others may only participate on male teams.

And once a transgender student in Oregon selects the gender of the team on which they participate, they can only play on teams of that gender throughout the duration of their high school career.

The OSAA set its policy after other states were forced to.

“If we don’t stay up with the times and modify our policies and things like that, we end up trying to administer 20th century rules in a 21st century system,” Weber said.

Who oversees the OSAA?

During the reclassification process that took effect in 2006 – the one that expanded Oregon’s classifications to six from four – many people in Eugene, Medford and Salem-Keizer were upset that they would now have to travel long ways for league games.

The Eugene, Medford and Salem-Keizer school districts sued the OSAA, but then-state superintendent of public instruction Susan Castillo upheld the system.

“At that time we were under the purview of the Oregon Department of Education,” Weber said. “They reviewed us every five years.”

Since then, however, the Oregon De-

partment of Education dropped its oversight of the OSAA – along with several other agencies.

And now there is no independent group that reviews the OSAA, although the Oregon State legislature has some say.

“We’re referred to in some of the legislative policies as a volunteer activities association,” Weber said.

One way the OSAA maintains balance is its associated groups: The Oregon Athletic Coaches Association, the Oregon Athletic Directors Association, the Oregon School Boards Association and the Oregon Athletic Officials Association.

Those groups representing different interests within high school sports in Oregon all have representation on all of the levels of OSAA’s governance, which makes the state unique in that its associated organizations have influence on the legislative process.

“Numerous places, whenever I travel the United States and go to national meetings, they’re continually asking me,” said Younger of the coaches association, “how in the world did you get this situation that you’re so involved at the state level?”

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