



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Traffic passes by the former J.C. Penney Co. location in downtown Pendleton on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022. The building soon will be home to a Sears Hometown Store.

Sears:

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Mountain Independent in Arizona.

While 124 S. Main St. is large for downtown Pendleton, it's too small to house the full-fledged department stores Sears and J.C. Penney operate at malls and shopping centers. While the Pendleton J.C. Penney did stock some home goods like its larger brethren, most of the store's floor space was dedicated to apparel.

Before its closure, the Pendleton J.C. Penney prominently displayed its status as the oldest J.C. Penney in its original location in the country. Like all traditional department stores, J.C. Penney Co. has shrunk as it faced growing competition from big box stores and online retailers.

Pendleton seemed to defy that trend at first. In

2015, Jager Development signed a 15-year lease with J.C. Penney as the Pendleton store looked to make some improvements to the space's interior and shift its focus to women's apparel. But Pendleton couldn't fight off the headwinds forever. Just two years after signing a new lease, the corporation ended the Pendleton store's 106-year tenure along with more than 130 branches.

When it opens in the coming weeks, Sears Hometown will join Western Auto Home & Appliance as one of the only places to buy large appliances such as washing machines, although Aaron's offers appliances for rent-to-own. Umatilla County also is getting its first Sears Hometown location since Hermiston saw its Hometown store close in 2020. Early this year, community groups briefly turned the former Sears building in Hermiston into a daytime warming shelter for the unhoused.

Power:

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need right of entry. These include not just properties on the route but ones providing access to other lands, public and private.

There will be hundreds of towers, and the entire line will be over ground, Berg said. He described them as steel lattice and H-frame structures. The steel lattice structures average 140 feet tall with a 40-foot-by-40-foot footprint. The steel H-frame towers are, on average, 100 feet tall, he said.

These are large structures, he said, but landowners will be able to farm under and around them. He added there are no safety concerns from electromagnetic frequencies, as long as you are not "right up on them."

The power companies would make one-time payments to the landowners as compensation, he said.

Importance of the project

"From our perspective, we see this as absolutely crucial to what we call the future and maintaining our tradition of reliable and affordable energy," Berg said.

He said the country will require "greater and more robust" transmission connections between regions and intra-regionally. He said this will be necessary if we are to increase the amount of clean energy moving from producers to users.

Power, he said, will connect to other grids, extending as far as Arizona. "That energy can move



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Richard Hemphill opens the gate to Parker Road on Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022, to access a 1,000-acre parcel of his family's property where the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line will pass near Pilot Rock.

far and wide, and it can go the other way, too," Berg said.

And B2H could be the transmission line that allows power from Phoenix, Arizona, on a sunny day, to reach Portland when it is needed.

The line will take roughly three years to build, Berg said. Construction could start in 2023, and will bring new jobs and business to areas all along the route. He added it will increase cash property revenue to counties on the route.

B2H affects ranchers but helps data centers

Jim Doherty, chair of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners, expressed mixed feelings about the line. He said he has spoken with landowners, including cattle ranchers, to hear their anger. For himself, he said, he also has negative feelings.

"Generally, I'm kind of opposed to it," he said.

Adding tons of steel and wires across Mother

Earth is not ideal, he said, but the construction of the Longhorn substation, starting point for the line, is an \$80-\$100 million project and would make possible new data centers and other area businesses.

"There are a lot of things looking for that power and needing it, and there's a shorter and shorter supply down here all the while," Doherty said.

He could get behind the project, he said, if the route could be altered to do less harm to local landowners.

"We're taking one for the team, and those cattle ranchers on the century farms that built Morrow County, they're really taking one for the team," the commissioner said.

He said the county board, at this point, lacks leverage in this situation. He said he would like to see the route changed or landowners receive a larger payout for easements, but the county does not have power over this. He said a previous Morrow County Board of

Commissioners may have been able to do something, but the opportunity has passed.

Feeling powerless in face of power line

On the land Idaho Power soon will survey for the transmission line, the Hemphills farm wheat. That property alone is 1,000 acres, they said. Jean Hemphill said her family has owned that particular piece of land since 1917.

One family member died of the flu epidemic of the early 20th century, she recalled, and others lived on the land without indoor plumbing. This is a land that has a lot of history, she said. Some of the history even predates her family's ownership. One landmark on the property is a stone structure, which may have been made during conflicts with Native Americans, she said.

And though the Hemphills have many more acres in the area, they said they are far from royalty. Just as the land has a history of people struggling, the Hemphills said they have their own concerns. Rising costs for seed, fuel and chemicals have made business difficult, they said.

The planned construction of B2H has added to their worries. They said they are upset about work disrupting their farming. Another concern is the possibility that towers will trouble farming and wildlife, long after they receive their one-time payment.

"It's been really, really hard," Jean Hemphill said.

She said she believes the line is inevitable, and she and her husband are powerless in comparison to much more powerful groups that are set on the line.

Drivers:

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Primmer said there was no certainty they would stay committed given they wouldn't be directly employed by Uber.

"I don't know how you can guarantee who will be driving for Uber six months from now (since) they are independent contractors," he said.

Matthew and Rod Johlke also reiterated points they've previously made to the council. Given the size of Pendleton, having Uber and Elite Taxi running concurrently would likely drive the latter out of business, Matthew Johlke said. And since Elite Taxi also contracts with the city to operate its senior and disabled transportation program, it would leave a gap Uber couldn't fill.

"There's just simply not enough calls in the market," he said.

However, the Johlkes did offer a plan that would split service hours between the two sides: Elite Taxi would get 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. while Uber would operate during the remaining hours. During large tourists events such as the Pendleton Round-Up and Pendleton Whisky Music Fest when calls for service outstrip Elite Taxi's capacity, the Uber hours could be expanded to accommodate the customer traffic.

Mayor John Turner said he was pleased that both sides offered some concessions and seemed willing to compromise. He asked city attorney Nancy Kerns to help form a working group with both the Uber drivers and Elite Taxi to see if a policy could be created out of their proposals.

POM:

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These two leaders, he said, are Chief Operations Officer Mark Patton and Economic Development Director Lisa Mittelsdorf.

Stokoe recalled the process of hiring Neal. His father, Gary Neal, helmed the port until he retired in 2018. The port began a search for a replacement that "went on for quite a while," Stokoe said.

"We ended up interviewing several candidates for that position," he said. "And Ryan was one of them that was part of the interview process."

He said Neal "rose to the top" of the candidate list quickly. He had been working for the port in the warehouse, so the port board experience was valued.

"It seemed like a natural progression," Stokoe said of Neal's advancement to the

executive director job. "We were familiar with him, and he did extremely well in the interview process."

Stokoe said the port is not ready to begin searching for Neal's successor.

"It's too early," he said. "Out of respect for Mr. Neal, we're not going to get in a rush. Our administrative team has done an absolutely wonderful job, carrying on, even though they are under a great deal of pressure, obviously, losing their executive director."

He added the port board has not decided on how to move forward just yet. According to Stokoe, there will be some sort of process to replace Neal, though he does not know what it might look like.

"Ryan was a great guy. It's really tough, because it was so unexpected," Stokoe said. "He was a great leader, a great man and a loving father. He's truly going to be missed."

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