

Commissioners Corner
By Dick Scott

The 122 mile stretch of rail from Towner to the North Avondale Junction out east of Pueblo- The Towner Line- is reaching a very critical stage. VS Railroad will make their final payment for this line to CDOT in Dec of 2011 and will own and control it. Information from CDOT indicates the intent of VS is to dismantle the rails and sell them as rails or as scrap metal. CDOT does have an option to buy the rail back before it is torn up if VS does option to scrap the line. CDOT may or may not exercise that option. One thing almost certain is that if these rails are ever physically removed, they will be gone forever and the likelihood of a new rail ever being built is not even remotely likely.

The Colorado General Assembly and the US Congress found great need to preserve this line back in 1998 when Union Pacific took it over. The validity of this need may be even greater today than it was then. This is what the 61st Colorado General Assembly stated in their legislation to preserve The Towner Line:

“Abandonment of the Towner Railroad Line and removal of the railroad tracks from that line would result in the permanent loss of that line. The loss of the Towner Line would severely impair the access of the southeastern portion of Colorado to commercial rail transportation. The permanent loss of the Towner Line would damage the economy and harm the citizens of Colorado, as well as jeopardize the continued viability and physical condition of other transportation infrastructure of the state. It is beneficial to the citizens of Colorado that the Towner Line be preserved.”

Freight rails- including the Towner Line- need to be preserved and utilized because (1) they offer major advantages in energy efficiency over other modes; (2) they offer a huge advantage in friendliness to the environment; (3) they can be a major contributor to reduced highway congestion and (4) they offer major advantages in safety.

It seems feasible that the 20 to 30 trains that traveled this line daily before it was shut down could once again travel at or near that same rate.

The loss of the Towner Line has cost Kiowa County at least \$6.5 Million in lost revenue.

This line could once again contribute greatly to an improved grain market for the area. It could very well open the door to new value added crop markets to the west coast.

The Towner Line itself is an example of a value added product-- it would not take a lot to have it operational again.

The Congressional Budget Office 2006 study on “Freight Rail and Transportation Long Term Issues” clearly indicates a demand for more rail, not LESS

The Commissioners of Kiowa and Crowley counties, the 61st Colorado General Assembly, the US Congress and the Congressional Budget Office findings would be diametrically opposed to closing the Towner Line. Rather than closing it we should be figuring out how to make it operable again!!

Citizen advocacy is an effective persuasion. If you want to support preserving this rail, let your State Representatives and Senators know.

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