

February 12, 2020

To: House Committee on Energy and Environment

From: Inga Fisher Williams  
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Portland, OR 97212

Re: HB 4105 – statement for the hearing record

As I could not present these comments in person at the public hearing yesterday, I am writing to ask that this statement be made part of the hearing record.

I support HB 4051 and consider it long overdue for the Oregon legislature to pass a rail safety bill. The Mosier train derailment and fire should have been a warning. That we 'dodged a bullet' is now accepted consensus about the accident when a rare windless day in the Gorge prevented what might have been a catastrophe.

The oil train safety issues introduced by the very flammable oil shipments and "mega" trains of 100 or more cars are pretty well known and have been discussed in the Oregon legislature for several sessions without leading to legislation that addresses the weaknesses in Oregon's current laws. It is deplorable that past bills were practically gutted by the rail road lobby which presented false statements and threatened a law suit. As a result, Oregon has fallen behind in protecting communities along rail routes.

This proposed bill would at least create parity with our neighboring states' regulations and take into account the special hazards of shipping Bakken crude, a highly explosive crude oil, by trains through cities and towns where a blast zone would devastate residences, schools, hospitals. It does not directly regulate oil shipments by rail but it is a start.

I am also in full support of the proposed restrictions on fossil fuel infrastructure expansion on state land. The proposed bill would send a strong signal that our state is serious about GHG emission reductions. This is forward looking provision in line with a transition away from fossil fuels. This transition will require incentives and investments in renewable energy development not new infrastructure investments that lock companies into several decades of cost recovery. The provisions in this bill give fair notice to industry that it is time to modify business models based on fossil fuels so that the hazard of owning stranded assets is avoided, a situation faced now by coal burning utilities when their coal plants are no longer cost competitive with renewables.

This is a forward looking bill that protects our state and strengthens safety regulation on oil trains which represent a new and dangerous hazard to communities.

I thank you for your work to on such timely and important legislation.