

From: [Oliver Orjiako](#)
To: [Jeffrey Delapena](#)
Cc: [Jose Alvarez](#)
Subject: FW: Re:Battle Ground's rejection of a 33 mile Chelatchie Prairie Railroad commercial expansion
Date: Friday, June 21, 2024 8:35:16 AM

Hello Jeffrey:

For the railroad freight dependent use index of record. Thank you.

From: Clark County Citizens United, Inc. <cccuinc@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2024 7:50 PM
To: cityclerk.info@cityofbg.org
Subject: Re:Battle Ground's rejection of a 33 mile Chelatchie Prairie Railroad commercial expansion

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside of Clark County. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

City of Battle Ground
2024
Battle Ground City Council
Battle Ground Mayor
Battle Ground Planning Commission
109 SW 1st Street,
Battle Ground, Washington 98604

June 20,

FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Re:Battle Ground's rejection of a 33 mile Chelatchie Prairie Railroad commercial expansion

Dear Battle Ground City Councilors, Mayor and Planning Commission

Clark County Citizens United, Inc. is a 501c4 non-profit with approximately 6,000 members. Since the 1994 GMA planning requirements, CCCU has been active in county land use and has supported the city of Battle Ground. Because we do care about the city, CCCU is on the other side of the track, from Friends of Clark County. When it comes to the Chelatchie Prairie Railroad, CCCU wholeheartedly supports its commercial expansion. CCCU believes that railroad is a "diamond in the rough" just waiting to be polished. It will solve many of our jobs, housing and transportation problems and will be good for our communities. FOCC has focused on the "sky is falling" concept with the worst that might happen, but CCCU is focused on what will actually happen. For Battle Ground to reject this diamond, is a grave mistake.

In the *Loise Alworth Tucker* history book called "**Battle Ground In and Around**" there is much information dedicated to the 33 miles of railroad that runs diagonally through the

county. The book explains that *“In 1884 Clark County was bypassed by railroad service. Trains went along the south side of the Columbia River east and west from Portland and down into the Willamette Valley but excluded Clark County. This was one of the major reasons for Vancouver to develop more slowly than Portland, even though it had great port possibilities.”* (page 65). The question must be asked, do the citizens of Clark County want to continue to enhance the economy of Portland, or do they want to develop a robust economy here in Clark County and in Battle Ground.

Page 66 of the book has a chronological order of facts regarding the railroad.

1869 – Completion of the Transcontinental Railroad from Omaha to San Francisco.

1883 – The Railroad extends to Portland from California

1888 – First contract let ten miles of rail line of the Vancouver, Klickitat and Yakima company.

1889 – Railroad cars arrive by shop to Vancouver for a sawmill built in Vancouver.

1890s – Depression in the nation, railroad in financial trouble

1893 – Vancouver sawmill goes bankrupt.

1897 – Court orders sale of the railroad

1898 – New corporation formed and named Portland, Vancouver and Yakima.

1898 – The rail line was finished as far as Brush Prairie.

1901 – The rail line is completed to Battle Ground.

1902 – The rail line is completed to Heisson

1902 – Yacolt Burn destroys millions of feet of timber, the rail line at Yacolt was stopped.

1903 PVY orders three shay locomotives

1903 – Station house completed in Yacolt.

1903 – Two companies join the lines, called Washington Railroad and Navigation Company.

1903 – The WRN is transferred to Northern Pacific Railroad

1908 - Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway builds bridge over Columbia from Portland

and extends lines up the Columbia

River. Clark County bypassed by any main lines.

1910 – Still talk of a rail line to Yakima

The stations along the track with the Washington and Oregon line included:

Vancouver, Hidden, Barberton, Homan, Laurin, Brush Prairie, Battle Ground

Crawford, Heisson, Wall, Lucia, Moulton and Yacolt. (page 74)

Railway passenger service was provided and attached to the log trains.

The railroad provided the only transportation to Vancouver for several months, until the paved roads were built.

At one time the schedule included daily round trips along with the mail. The evening passenger run from Vancouver was the social event of the day.

A 1909 news article reported the Tum Tum Railway Company was to enter the Chelatchie Valley to construct a forty-five mile electric line from the mountain to Ridgefield. The line would serve the Dayton sawmill and a line was proposed to Amboy and Yacolt. This did not develop. (page 75)

The rail line from Hidden to Chelatchie Prairie was constructed and operated by the Longview, Portland and Northern Railroad owned by International Paper Company

1909 – Regular passenger service was provided from the Yacolt depot. Men, women and children were dressed in their best traveling clothes.

1910 - Approximately 4% of the population lived in Yacolt, which was incorporated in 1908.

With this background history, we can see the railroad was the lifeline for Clark County communities. Now CCCU skips to 2004 to 2007. In the **2007 Metropolitan Transportation Plan of Clark County**, we see there was an Active Community Environments program that encouraged human powered transportation. It was operated by the Active Community Environments Task Force and meetings were held in 2005 and 2006, in conjunction with Community Choices. In addition, we will note comments made by the **Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council** over the best use of the 33 mile railroad.

These reports state,

“In 1984, the owners of the railroad filed abandonment whereby the county saw the opportunity to save a unique transportation right of way for future use and preserve rail service to commercial clients. The county purchased the line for \$1.2 million and leased the line to the Lewis and Clark Railway Company for freight service and passenger/excursion service. A new 30 year lease was signed with the Columbia Basin Railroad Company Inc. in 2004.”

“The Chelatchie Prairie Railroad is approximately 33 miles long, running from the Burlington Northern mainline in north Vancouver to Chelatchie Prairie north of Yacolt. The right of way width ranges from 50 to 150 feet.....about 10 percent of the abutting properties have reversionary easements, whereby the property would revert to adjoining property owners if rail service ceased....” The existing roadbed is designed for a single track....

The Columbia Basin Railroad Company’s lease agreement with Clark County gives them full control over rail uses of the full right of way. Columbia Basin operates commercial service as the Portland Vancouver Junction Railroad, primarily serving shippers between the Vancouver and Battle Ground....Columbia Basin has grown the service to over 600 cars per year.....with approximately two to four runs per week on average.

“Clark County’s lease agreement with Columbia Basin Railroad Company is a 30 year lease with two additional renewal terms of 30 years each, which are at the “sole and exclusive option of the lessee.”

The report goes on to say that “ *Clark County has receive a **\$450,000 federal transportation enhancement** grant to develop a trail plan for the full length of the Chelatchie Prairie Railroad right of way.....This trail planning effort is just getting underway.....*

*“The state legislature has provided **\$300,000 for track upgrades in the 2006-07 biennium and \$1,100,000 in 2008-09.**’ (The total money allotted for track upgrades was \$1,400,000.)*

*“Given this strong support for the continuation and enhancement of commercial rail service in the corridor, transit concepts that rely on the elimination of commercial rail service **should not** be considered.”*

Now we turn to the **2015 Transportation Systems Plan Update** for the City of Battle Ground, Washington. **June 2015.** On page 35 is a chart regarding long range proposals for the city.

Items 113, 115, 116, 117 and 118 all provide for funding a Rails with Trails for the Chelatchie Prairie Railroad. The total of those allotments comes to **\$7,291,300** of hard earned tax dollars. In other words, Battle Ground was proposing to use over seven million dollars for a trail. Do the city taxpayers know this money was intended for a trail, and not for road improvements? Do they know millions of dollars was intended for a trail, instead of repair of city streets that are falling apart, while more streets are needed? CCCU doesn’t think so.

It is time for Battle Ground to realize it can never return to the “good old days”. With the high density pressures put upon the people for housing choices in Vancouver and other cities, Battle Ground has become the city of quality, affordable single family homes. With that, it is growing, bringing in more and more amenities that, in the past, only Vancouver could provide. This is good for the city and the community, as it brings businesses, jobs and increased tax revenue.

So the question is, Why wouldn’t the city want an opportunity to expand those amenities while expanding its economy with a full fledged rail service for the city and beyond. CCCU can see nothing but good from this situation. So why is the Battle Ground Council denying the taxpayers of Battle Ground those opportunities. Does the city really think those approximately 20,000 taxpayers would rather have a trail, which will see very little use. Or would they rather have businesses that would provide good paying jobs close to home? In addition, it would be an opportunity to provide commuter rail service to their jobs located out of the city. Would this situation not be good for the people and good for Battle Ground?

CCCU thinks that Battle Ground is not looking out for the welfare of its people. It complains that 90% of its residents work out of the area, but when they have an opportunity to provide those jobs in house, they reject it. They are charging residents more money for road infrastructure needs, when they are willing to spend over seven million dollars for a trail boondoggle. One only needs to look at the one mile of trail from Battle Ground Lake State Park to see just how expensive such a trail would be. The public calls that short trail the “million dollar mile” Is that really what the city wants to do? If that really what the citizens want?

Clark County Citizens United, Inc. wants to go on record supporting the development of the entire 33 miles of the Chelatchie Prairie Railroad for commercial use in Battle Ground and beyond. That is what it was used for when it was created, and the need for that use has never changed. It is part of the Washington Transportation System and the Washington legislature was not wrong to envision the economic benefits of a short line rail line to serve the cities and the rural people.

Far too often FOCC makes claims that are backed by emotion and not real research and science. They assume that if they tell the people the worse possible outcome, the people will believe them. The county and cities have a responsibility to assure folks that the benefits will outweigh the drawbacks. Code and rules will be put in place to protect the people from harm. But as a community we must decide whether we want 90% of our people driving to Vancouver or Portland to work. We must decide if we want to commute long distances and pay out of state taxes to another state. We must decide if we want our children to have a living wage job, in their own communities. The city of Battle Ground must change course and embrace the long term economic advantages of having a commercial railroad at their fingertips.

Sincerely,

Carol Levanen, Exec. Secretary

Clark County Citizens United, Inc.
P.O. Box 2188
Battle Ground, Washington 98604

Clark County Citizens United, Inc. P.O. Box 2188 Battle Ground, Washington 98604 E-Mail cccuinc@yahoo.com