

Transcript of Bill Barnum
Eureka City Council Meeting
12-20-11

Thank you. I'm Bill Barnum, I live in Ridgewood. I need to get a call in to Cindy and meet you. I practice law here in the corner.

We want to share with you a little bit of a history story that we have been researching and learning about. As you all are aware, railroads have a significant history in Humboldt County because of their use in transporting first logs and later lumber to market and some historians report that the original railroad in Arcata on its long wharf was the first working commercial railroad in California. The railroads proliferated in this area, and the problem of course was we had to get down to the big markets. And a competition ensued, and this is what's fun. The competition was between those who wanted to build a railroad to the east, to Redding or Red Bluff, and those who wanted to build to the Bay Area. Now the latter group was led by the interests of the Pacific Lumber Company, which was incorporated in 1869. Their headquarters was in the Russ Building in the financial district in San Francisco. And certainly after the Great Quake in 1906 there was an immediate market for their goods. So the efforts ensued and the rail came from the south and of course from the north and connected famously at Island Mountain in 1914. But it wasn't for lack of an effort on the part of the folks who wanted to go east.

It is a fun thing to research on a rainy day. We just don't get many rainy days this year, but as soon as we get one you should

look up the story of the big four railroad capitalists including Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker (the first guy had a university the second guy had a bank), John Hopkins of the hotel fame and a man named Collis Potter Huntington. Well it turns Huntington is the most dynamic of the four. He was involved with railroading in most of his adult life. Came here and went broke in 1853. Had to go back to New York to work out with his creditors so he could continue in business and didn't like his creditors in New York. So after more failure he went next door to his neighbor Mark Hopkins in Old Town Sacramento and they struck up a business as Huntington and Hopkins and Company. Basically it was a general store and a Piersons all in one in Old Town Sacramento. By 1860 they had teamed up with Leland Stanford and Charles Crocker in an upstairs office and cooked up the idea of the Central Pacific Railroad. Well obviously they needed some help and that help came in the 1860's from someone like Abraham Lincoln and the original Rail Acts. What the federal government did helped these gentleman construct the original major rail infrastructure in the West.

Huntington died in New York at his Adirondack cabin in 1900. Before he passed, he championed the railroad from Tehama to Humboldt, the opposite direction, the idea there was to build a railroad out to the Tomhead copper mines about 53 miles west of Red Bluff. Well, on the Humboldt side, those who were interested engaged the leading mapmaker-surveyor-cartographer of the era, then a young man, by the name of Jess Lentell. Lentell began surveying in Humboldt County around 1891, the original surveyor of the town of Samoa. You probably have some Lentell maps around this building if you look for them. In 1909 Lentell was engaged to conduct a reconnaissance or what is often called a reconnoiter. It is not a survey but it is a walking field note exercise. Those archived notes are the basis

of what I've just shared with you tonight. I'm gonna leave with your Manager just the first four pages rather than 80 pages because you want to retrace it, but his field note reads Humboldt and eastern Reconnaissance 1909 and it begins out in a marsh at Bayside and it runs out through Korbelt.

Obviously the rail was connected out to Fairhaven by 1909 but the idea would be that there would be rail from the bay out through Korbelt. Now you just have to put your geographic mind on, and then we are going to traverse to the northwestern side of the north fork of the Mad River. 299 runs up you know that bridge over the North Fork of the Mad. Well, the railroad would be to the left of that and as it rises up the ridge at one and a half percent grade, at the end of that ridge it would make a large circular turn and head east. And they can maintain a ridgeline route out to Wiregrass ridge and across 299 right over the top of the vehicles there at Lord Ellis summit. And then heading on a southeasterly track out to Bald Mountain and then Snow Camp and then out to what is known as the Low-Gap of Mad River. At the Low-Gap area the rail has to penetrate the mountain with a tunnel, that's Kinsey Ridge. When it pops out the other side it has left the Coast Range geologic province so all these soils that create so many problems for us down low, what they call the head wall area of stream crossings, all of that is behind you.

You have been on the ridgeline since just north of the Mad River bridge on 299. So instead of having 10s or a 100 miles of bad soils we have come up on the ridgeline to avoid those, penetrated through, and now we are on the east side of South Fork Mountain. The rail then winds down to Hyampom, east-northeast to Hayfork, southeast on the South Fork of Cottonwood Creek, pops out. You are out of the mountains and you are on the west side of the valley and then, contrary to this

reconnoiter which went to Redding, the route would go modernly to the town of Gerber, immediately south and east of Red Bluff where there is a place to switch trains.

In the 1870s this was proposed and money was raised but as we know when we know the story and go forward to 1914, all those efforts were stymied because PALCO beat them to it. They got their railroad built with the Southern Pacific coming north and later we all know it as the Northwestern Pacific Railroad. And in our lifetimes that was the operating railroad. Occasionally it had problems, in '64 it had problems and then the '98 storms it all effectively ended.

Now the idea of a rail to the east is different because the times are different. The economic goal now is not just to transport lumber to market and maybe some other local products, but to connect the port to the national rail system. And when you get over to the valley, you can go north to Portland and Seattle and you can go south to Oakland and Longbeach and we can get also east out to Chicago.

So as it's been envisioned, the idea for Humboldt would be the port would be completely rejuvenated as an export port for agricultural products and a "land bridging" port for products coming from the Pacific Rim. So this could entail some significant economic revitalization around Humboldt Bay.

Now obviously the problem is, we have a 140 year old idea and we have no recent feasibility analysis, so the talk on the street is "we shouldn't even be talking about it until we know it is good" and we think that's not good public policy. We want to talk about it even though we don't know if it is good.

So what we are asking the cities to do, we drafted a template resolution which I am not asking you to adopt tonight.

But I would encourage some conversation and we are going to ask all the local cities and the County to weigh in with the idea of approving the idea of obtaining a feasibility study. I don't know who is going to do it. I don't know who is going to pay for it. But we want to get the idea positively accepted for a look.

That's the gist of my presentation tonight. I have some other things to share with you about railroading, which I would encourage you all to spend a little Google time with: for instance, there are 382 small railroads, short line railroads, operating in the United States and their economic activity is up. You might also find it interesting that the average railroad job with benefits pays \$104,000 and change per year. These are significant jobs, not to mention the ancillary jobs that might come with having an active export-import port. So we think that rail is the key, and now is the time to ask that question. Obviously if the feasibility is shown to not be practical we can look to other things, but with the economy being what it is, our need for jobs being so profound, we would encourage your interest and maybe at a later time I come back and give you a different presentation. Any questions?