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Nevada calls for DOE to withdraw notice for new railroad to Yucca Mountain, allow more time for review

CARSON CITY – In a letter sent Friday to the U.S. Department of Energy, Nevada officials called for DOE to withdraw and re-issue notices for public meetings and comment on its latest plans to evaluate a new rail route for carrying nuclear waste through some of the most populated and well-traveled parts of northern and western Nevada.

Nevada opposes the federal government's plans to store high-level nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, about 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. The state also opposes DOE's latest transportation proposals, according to the Oct. 20 letter from Bob Loux, executive director of Nevada's Agency for Nuclear Projects.

"First of all, Nevada does not favor any proposed rail route. There's no good way to get nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain," Loux said. "That being said, DOE's latest plan to transport waste through the so-called Mina corridor actually impacts more Nevada cities and towns than any other route they could have selected."

For instance, Loux said DOE's proposed "Mina corridor" route would move waste on existing railroad lines running parallel with Interstate 80 from the California border on the west and the Utah border on the east, carrying high-level nuclear waste through downtown Reno and its new below-grade railroad "trench." Waste trains from the east would come through Elko, he added.

Under the "Mina corridor" proposal, DOE proposes to ship waste across Northern Nevada along Union Pacific Railroad tracks, turning southeast around Fernley, then crossing west of Fallon through the Walker River Indian Reservation to Hawthorne.

(more)

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From there, DOE would build or renovate a rail line to a point near the town of Mina in Mineral County, Nev. The line would then run mostly south toward Tonopah and Goldfield, along the west side of the Nellis Air Force Range to Yucca Mountain.

On Oct. 13, DOE issued a formal notice of intent that it will prepare an environmental impact statement covering a roughly 280-mile swath of Nevada being considered for a railroad to transport high-level nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain. DOE also issued a separate notice of intent related to its plans to redesign a proposed nuclear waste handling complex on the surface of the Yucca Mountain ridge.

In his letter, Loux urged DOE to give Nevadans more time and more chances to comment on these plans. He called on DOE to extend the comment period from the existing 45 days to at least 90 days and to have detailed maps ready to show the public. He also suggested that DOE hold meetings in other communities that will be impacted by these plans, including Reno, Elko, Battle Mountain, Winnemucca, Lovelock and Yerington, Nev., as well as in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Sacramento, Calif.

“The notices of October 13, 2006, are yet another example of DOE burdening Nevadans with short time limits and inadequate information for meaningful participation,” Loux wrote in his letter to Edward Sproat, director of DOE’s Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management.

DOE announced last week that it plans to hold the following public meetings:

- In Amargosa Valley at the Longstreet on state Route 373 from 4-7 p.m. Nov. 1.
- In Caliente at the Caliente Youth Center on U.S. Highway 93 North from 6-8 p.m. on Nov. 8.
- In Goldfield at the Goldfield School Gymnasium from 4-7 p.m. on Nov. 13.
- In Hawthorne at the Hawthorne Convention Center, 932 E St., from 4-7 p.m. on Nov. 14.
- In Fallon at the Fallon Convention Center, 100 Campus Way, from 4-7 p.m. on Nov. 15.

Meetings on DOE’s proposed changes to above-ground aspects of the proposed nuclear waste repository will be held:

- In Amargosa Valley at the Longstreet from 4-7 p.m. on Nov. 1.
- In Las Vegas at Cashman Center, 850 Las Vegas Blvd. North, from 4-7 p.m. on Nov. 2.

For a copy of the letter, visit www.state.nv.us/nucwaste/whatsnew or call (702) 853-7334.

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