

Article for enews 8/5/25

At the request of a PORA Board member, the PORA Board and the PORA-BNSF Committee met on Wednesday, July 30th with several BNSF Railroad officials to exchange information and present a number of concerns from Sun City West residents. For details on this project please visit the PORA website and click on the BNSF Committee link at the top of the page.

PORA has stated opposition to the location of the project but not the concept of the project itself; it is not desired near this populated area of the NW Valley. The Railroad officials presented information to support the project benefits for the NW Valley.

The main objections to the project are related to a large increase in traffic noise, pollution and safety for travel on US 60 (Grand Ave.) and SR 303. Many heavy truck loads travelling on local roadways will lead to additional maintenance problems. Environmental issues include air quality, lighting, water use, flood control, etc. Health issues for nearby residents are a concern. An environmental impact assessment (EIA) is needed.

The BNSF officials noted the original proposal for the project has been modified to improve lighting issues, creation of sound barriers around the property and reduced intersections for truck travel to and from the facility. Newer model locomotives will have fewer emission issues than previous models.

BNSF also noted that while traffic will increase substantially, this increase will not be as severe as the effect from a 4,000 home subdivision on the same property. However, this argument does not consider the traffic from the BNSF facility will consist of a large number of diesel-powered trucks, not residential type vehicles.

PORA countered by noting that there is no subdivision at this time and the only comparison should be with the open desert area currently in place, a negative impact.

For many years the railroad has considered the Wittmann location as one of the best for its future expansion in the Phoenix area. BNSF also noted that their current Glendale facility is now at over capacity because of the rapid growth of the Phoenix area. The Glendale operations will move to the new Wittmann facility. This action will actually reduce rail traffic through the Sun Cities along Grand Avenue.

The single most significant event from this meeting was the statement that BNSF will proceed with the first phase of the project, the 1770-acre Intermodal Facility to receive trains and provide a switchyard, regardless of the zoning decision from the Board of Supervisors. This action is permitted under Federal Preemption Law governing railroad construction operations. These laws preempt state and local laws and date back into the

19th century. Further information on the applicable Federal Laws on this topic will be forthcoming in future postings for the interested reader.

Currently BNSF has asked the Board of Supervisors for a continuance of the hearing to consider the zoning changes to November 5th to work out the Traffic Impact Analysis with ADOT, MCDOT, MAG and the city of Surprise.

Other topics discussed included water use being less than expected, and wastewater treatment to high quality, number of employees, protection of “Dark Skies” initiative, possible hazardous spills, security, crime, building sizes and locations, Nadaburg School and next phases for the project.

For additional information from the railroad, please contact Lena.Kent@BNSF.com and visit PORASCW.org.