

## Siskiyou Summit Railroad Revitalization – TIGER IV Application

**PROJECT OVERVIEW:** During early 2012, Southern Oregon and Northern California wood product companies, the Governor’s SW Regional Solutions Team, Siskiyou County, CA, Douglas and Jackson County, OR, and CORP developed and supported a successful \$7 million federal TIGER IV application for rail improvements to the Siskiyou Line operated by Central Oregon and Pacific Railroad (CORP). The project, between Medford, Oregon and Weed, California, will reinstate the line, which has been out of service since 2008.



The Siskiyou pass is the highest in North America and its unique topography and steep grades present challenges for moving freight across the region. The **SISKIYOU SUMMIT RAILROAD REVITALIZATION** will reconnect timber producing northern California with Oregon’s forest products industry in the Rogue Valley. This project will remove millions of unnecessary highway truck miles and eliminate circuitous railroad routing of finished timber products destined for California and points south and east. The project will generate significant reductions of green house gases, reduce highway pavement damage, prevent the degradation of valuable raw materials in transit, and reduce highway accidents, injuries, and fatalities on treacherous mountain routes with steep grades and curves.

To find solutions to reopen the line, the Coos-Siskiyou Shippers Coalition brought together industry, CORP, and local, state, and federal government representatives, including the Governor’s SW Regional Solutions Team (RST) Coordinator. It was determined that a federal TIGER grant program might provide the best chance at re-opening the line. The RST Coordinator then worked with his ODOT team member to outline and lead a process to compete in what was soon realized to be a rapidly approaching funding round. As TIGER funds require the applicant to be a public entity, ODOT stepped up as lead applicant, having the capacity to do so and with the Governor’s support to take on an “out of the box” task given the regional priority of the project. Siskiyou County stepped up as a secondary co-applicant to represent the California side of the equation. The Central Oregon and Pacific Railroad (CORP) agreed to provide \$2.4 m in match funds, and Douglas and Jackson Counties each approved \$20,000 in matching funds. Regional Shippers stepped up with \$50,000, crucial funds allowing ODOT to quickly contract with a consultant to write the winning grant application.

**BACKGROUND:** Since 2008, the only freight rail line directly connecting the timber producing regions of Northern California with numerous timber-processing facilities in southern Oregon’s Rogue Valley has been closed to traffic. For five years companies producing veneers and logs in California’s Siskiyou County have relied solely on trucks to transport raw materials over the Siskiyou Summit. These heavy trucks travel within sight of the dormant rail line for much of their route.

Green veneer and some oversized logs that will not fit on lathes in Weed are then transported – currently by truck – over the Siskiyou Summit and into the Rogue Valley to plywood plants in Medford, White City, Grants Pass, Riddle, Dillard, and Coquille, OR. At these plants, green veneer is dried so that it will accept glue. Wood chips from the Weed facility are also transported by truck to the Port of Coos Bay, OR for export to the Japanese market.

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In addition to finished plywood, the plants in Oregon's Rogue Valley also produce large volumes of finished lumber and engineered timber products. These products are often bound for markets south and east of the Rogue Valley. However, the rail route to these destinations can be quite circuitous and lengthy in both distance and time. If southbound rail routes were open over the Siskiyou Summit, much of that finished product would provide a south-bound "backhaul" for veneer and log trains running north from California.

**JOB CREATION:** Unlike traditional highway projects, freight rail improvements to existing rail infrastructure can be completed very quickly. Near term, within a year, it is expected this project will create construction-related employment to upgrade the rail line of 31.5 Full Time Equivalent positions for track work and construction. Long term, it will sustain and increase manufacturing-related employment in the region, which is already distressed from the economic downturn. According to Allyn Ford, Chairman of the Coos Siskiyou Shippers Coalition, "Restoring service to the Siskiyou Summit will protect jobs and enhance industrial growth in Northern California and Southern Oregon." And Steven Swanson with Swanson Group, Inc, states that "As a major rail shipper I can say that the Siskiyou Summit Railroad Revitalization Project will help ensure a future for each of our mills."

CORP and ODOT anticipate initiating construction within 180 days or less of completion of a grant agreement between parties. Depending on weather and the time necessary to finalize grant agreements, this project could be completed as early as one year before the TIGER IV deadline to *start* construction.

**PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT:** A diverse partnership supports this project, including private and public entities, including:

- Oregon Federal Congressional Delegation
- Southern Oregon State Representatives and Senators
- Northern California State Representatives
- Coos Siskiyou Shippers Coalition
- Siskiyou County California Board of Supervisors
- Douglas County Oregon Board of Commissioners
- Oregon Governor's Regional Solutions Team
- California Transportation Agency (Caltrans)
- Jackson County Oregon Board of Commissioners
- Medford-Jackson County Chamber of Commerce
- Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation
- Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development Inc.
- Siskiyou County California Economic Development Council
- Central Oregon and Pacific Railroad



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