

## Stayton/Woodburn railroad gets upgrades

The link will get new ties, new rail and resurfacing

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STAYTON – Railroad links between Stayton and Woodburn will soon be receiving some much-needed TLC.

The 32 miles of railroad will be upgraded to handle heavier freight loads from mostly lumber production, like shipments from the Trus Joist Macmillan Weyerhaeuser plant in Stayton. The project is funded by \$100 million the Oregon Transportation Commission approved for 43 different projects.

The project should be complete in approximately a year and a half.

“This is a very old, light rail,” said Stayton City Administrator Chris Childs. “There are lots of places along the track where it’s wobbly or even upside down, so this is really terrific news.”

He said that although the link is privately owned, the Cascade Scenic Railway — a group of interested individuals from Woodburn to Stayton — have worked with the tracks during the past six or seven years, with the dream that the link would ultimately carry passenger service or even a dinner train. However, Childs emphasized, more railway restrictions apply to tracks carrying passenger trains, and the current state of the link does not suffice.

Willamette Valley Railroad Company currently leases the link from Union Pacific, and, according to Willamette Valley Railroad Company owner and President David Root, the company constantly updates its link.

“We’re going to be working on the entire line,” Root said. “There are maybe one or two miles of rail that we haven’t done anything on, but otherwise, we’ve been upgrading every year.”

Root said that one of the most important parts of the upgrade will be replacing 25,000 railroad ties, some of which have not been worked on for up to 40 years. The normal lifespan for these wooden ties, he said, is approximately 60 years, and there are normally about 30,000 ties per mile. One tie of every three will be replaced along the line, Root said.

He said the link will also have approximately five miles of rail changed out, and the entire line will be surfaced.

And while this particular link does not travel any farther than Stayton, Childs said that upgrading the tracks would enable much greater economic connection to other Oregon cities and faraway states.

“We here at Stayton are at a dead end,” Childs said. “If you got on a train here going the other way, you’d go through Shaw, Silverton, Mount Angel and Woodburn. Woodburn connects with Union Pacific, so basically, you can ship from Stayton to New York City.”

“It’s about connection,” he said, “and it’s a real economic shot in the arm for the mid-valley.”

Root also emphasized that upgrading the very light rail to a more sturdy one will be a much safer way for customers to ship their materials, ultimately enabling more industrialization on the surrounding land.

Currently, he said, 45 percent of the traffic on the rail comes from Trus Joist, the largest customer for the rail. Wilco Farmers, Mount Angel Beverage Company, Bruce Pac, AmeriCold, Woodburn Fertilizer and Norpac Foods also utilize the link.

“When selling the land, we’ll be able to tell potential customers that we have good rails,” Root said. “It’s been a miracle that Trus Joist has been able to operate on such a light rail this long.”