

## Times-Standard (Eureka, CA)

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**Section:** Opinion

### Inside an east-west rail feasibility study

*David Hull and Lance Madsen/for the Times-Standard*

For a little more than a year, our community has been discussing an idea to explore the feasibility of an alternative rail route, aka east-west route, that would connect Humboldt Bay's deepwater seaport to the national rail network at a connection in the Sacramento valley. Throughout these discussions, people have wondered: Where will it go? How much will it cost? What are the environmental impacts? How long will it take to build? What will it carry? The truthful answer to all of those is "it will be in the feasibility study"; but what does that mean exactly? To provide more detail into the contents of a feasibility study, we must review how we got here, who is involved and the process that has developed over the past year. The idea to explore the feasibility of an east-west rail route was promoted by a grass-roots citizens group in late 2011. To explore projects that with a positive impact on the **local economy**, job creation and fuller utilization of Humboldt's harbor, the city of Eureka took the lead on this study in early 2012. More than 30 local, state and federal agencies as well as educational institutions, law enforcement, business interests, labor organizations and citizen groups have joined the city.

By the fall of 2012, a multi-jurisdictional committee called the UpState RailConnect Committee, was formed through a Memorandum of Agreement between the city of Eureka, Humboldt, Trinity, and Tehama counties, the Upstate California Economic Development Council and the Northern California Tribal Chairmen's Association. Through the MOA, these agencies agreed to gather public input; review documents such as request for proposals, consultant submittals, draft and final reports; participate in consultant selection; provide consultant oversight; assist with grant writing and local technical in-kind efforts and other tasks as mutually agreed upon by the members. There is no financial obligation created on any of the member agencies.

To date, the UpState RailConnect Committee has met three times. The draft Scope of Work for the feasibility study presently asks for the following information:

- Identification of a proposed route and alternatives (answers where will it go)
- Identification of land ownerships
- Assessment of economic benefit of a connection to the national rail system
- Assessment of market potential (answers what will it carry)
- Assessment of community and socioeconomic benefits along the proposed route
- Assessment of impact to ports

A conceptual development plan that will include:

- Recommendations on ownership/governance of the rail line/rail corridor (answers who will operate it)
- Prelim engineering
- Highway/port connectors/potential stops/spurs along the route
- Outline of national security issues
- Additional uses of the corridor (fiber optic, trail, water, etc.)
- Estimated permitting needs
- Estimated environmental issues and mitigations (answers what are the environmental impacts)
- Estimated development costs and timelines (answers how much will it cost and how long will it take to build)

All of the members of the UpState RailConnect Committee want to be sure the final Scope of Work asks the study's consultant to try and answer as many questions as possible that are important to the residents of Humboldt, Trinity and Tehama counties. Now it is your turn. If there is some question you would like to

have answered that does not appear on the above list, please email the UpState RailConnect Committee at L1325@suddenlink.net. For more information, you can also review committee information on the city of Eureka's website at [http://www.ci.eureka.ca.gov/depts/council/rail\\_study.asp](http://www.ci.eureka.ca.gov/depts/council/rail_study.asp).

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