

Background: Why Electrify Railroads?

Railroad companies were drawn deeply into the fossil fuel economy when the US government created the Interstate Highway system. The creation of a publicly subsidized highway infrastructure was a major cause of high value freight abandoning trains for trucks. Coal was the customer that saved the railroads.

The dependency of rail companies on heavy commodities like oil and coal, did away with regular schedules. Freight trains now depart when deemed full. Not having regular work schedules is a systemic cause of a fatigue-plagued, unsafe work environment that endangers workers, our communities and the environment. Because this problem is inherent to the way railroads do business, it is not something that can be negotiated or regulated away. That risk has until recently been unquestioned, assumed acceptable for lack of an alternative. The nearly catastrophic Mosier, Oregon derailment and explosion of June 2016 fueled a growing public awareness of “bomb trains.” People are asking serious questions about the risks and role of the current freight rail business model. Rail electrification provides a timely alternative to move beyond dependence on bulk fossil fuel transportation.

The continued extraction and combustion of fossil fuels such as coal and oil has been scientifically proven to represent a threat to the environment and the future of the planet. There is a mass movement domestically and globally to radically reduce the continued use of such fuels to power economic development; and other alternative energy sources – wind, solar, geothermal, hydroelectric – are developing rapidly and appear to be the wave of the future; and

For the transition to a clean economy to be just, workers and affected communities must enjoy access to new industries and good jobs. Investing in rail electrification and modernization is a ***Just Transition*** strategy.

In a time when reducing fossil fuel use is critical to restore the stability of a disrupted global climate, rail can offer a major transportation option that is powered by clean, renewable energy, ensuring jobs for rail workers and creating new clean energy jobs for displaced fossil fuel industry workers. As we run the trains on electricity, the rail corridors can be made into transmission routes from remote solar and wind resources to metropolitan markets.

Just about everybody will benefit from rail electrification. Through innovative public financing strategies, railroads will gain an infusion of capital to modernize lines. Increased speed and service-time reliability will make rail transport attractive to freight shippers and passengers, while diminishing reliance on bulk fossil fuel shipments. Shippers at every scale will have access to faster, more reliable cross-country freight transport. A new generation of passenger trains will provide fast, reliable and comfortable transportation to millions.

Rural and tribal utilities will be able to sell power generated on their lands, energizing the build-out of renewable energy across the country, with enormous benefits for communities that have been physically and economically stranded in recent decades. Utility customers will gain a reliable supply of renewable energy that can reduce consumer costs while allowing power companies to shut down old fossil-fuel generators.

See [Solutionary Rail: A people-powered campaign to electrify America’s railroads and open corridors to a clean energy future.](#)

Resolution in Support of Solutionary Rail:

An Economic “Just Transition” To A Low Carbon World

Whereas, Solutionary Rail is a people-powered campaign that proposes to switch our rail system from diesel to electricity. The catenary lines will double as a transmission corridor for clean energy projects in rural areas. The presence of a means of transmission will create an incentive for new clean energy projects in rural areas by creating an atmosphere where financing new projects is more feasible.

Whereas, the Solutionary Rail campaign will require a broad coalition of stakeholders with interests that intersect with railroad electrification, modernization and opening corridors for faster transport and renewable energy transmission.

Whereas Solutionary Rail proposes a public-private partnership to fund and oversee this transition.

Whereas, the burden of shifting from an economy based on fossil fuels to one based upon renewable energy should not be unfairly born by workers, including railroad workers; and

Whereas, to ensure that such a transition to alternative energy does not create an economy of low paid jobs for working people - including railroad workers - whose jobs could conceivably be threatened by such a transition;

Therefore Be it Resolved that Whatcom County Democrats support and endorse the Solutionary Rail grassroots campaign by:

1. Filling out the on-line endorsement page.
2. Announcing on your website and to media outlets.
3. Encouraging membership to become familiar with the campaign, and to volunteer to help move the process forward.

Adopted by Whatcom County Democrats at their January 18, 2018 monthly meeting of the membership.