

Commissioners table coal port issue – Eugene Register-Guard – Oct. 18, 2012

More than 30 people packed a Lane County commissioners' meeting Wednesday to speak out on the prospect of a coal port proposed in Coos Bay, only to learn the topic was being pulled from the county board's agenda.

Commission Chairman Sid Leiken said he removed a discussion of the port and a possible vote supporting it because the Port of Coos Bay told him the project isn't moving ahead as fast as expected. Leiken said it made little sense to debate a project that hasn't made it off the drawing board.

That didn't dissuade about two dozen people from staying to tell commissioners what they think about the idea of shipping coal from Wyoming and Montana through the Pacific Northwest, and Eugene, to reach the proposed new bulk cargo terminal in Coos Bay, where it would be shipped to Asia and burned in power plants.

A few people spoke out in favor of the new terminal and the jobs it would bring, but the large majority were firmly opposed to the project. They said having two 130-car coal trains traveling through the county each day and then returning would have far-ranging effects on people's health, the economy and global climate.

The comments mirrored those heard recently when the same topic was before the Eugene City Council and have been repeated at numerous public meetings throughout the Northwest as several ports consider coal projects. Coal ports have won support from some labor unions and business groups but are roundly condemned by environmentalists, public health groups and science groups.

Leiken said he did not know when discussions on the Coos Bay proposal might reach the stage at which the port might again ask the commissioners for support.