

Megaloads hearing starts Monday in Boise; opponents, engineer slated to testify

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(Source: Lewiston Morning Tribune, Idaho) By Elaine Williams, Lewiston Tribune, Idaho

April 23--Testimony from citizen monitors of an Imperial Oil test shipment and a Boise engineer will be part of a proceeding that starts Monday in Boise that will help decide if U.S. Highway 12 is a feasible route for more than 100 megaloads.

Retired State Court District Judge Duff McKee will preside as the hearing officer. McKee will be responsible for making a recommendation to the Idaho Transportation Department on the Imperial Oil proposal. He will listen to testimony from opponents as well as representatives of Imperial Oil, ExxonMobil and ITD.

Originally, Merlyn Clark was appointed as the hearing officer, the same role he filled when ITD was deciding if it would allow four megaloads of ConocoPhillips to use U.S. 12. Clark sided with ConocoPhillips and ITD issued the needed permits.

The opposition objected to Clark for the Imperial Oil case because he failed in numerous ways to understand the issues, said Linwood Laughy, a key member of the opposition.

Among the witnesses McKee will hear are citizen monitors who will share "details regarding Imperial/Exxon's first mishap-laden leg of its so-called 'test validation' shipment which stopped 13 miles short of its night No. 1 goal on April 11," according to a news release issued Friday by oversized load opponents.

More than 1,300 homes and businesses were left without power for about five hours in the early morning hours after the module hit an Avista support wire, according to Avista.

ITD suspended the trip as it awaited assurances from Imperial Oil, which is owned mostly by ExxonMobil, and the company's hired shipper, Mammoet, that the three-story-tall transport could safely maneuver under power lines.

Pat Dobie, of Dobie Engineering in Boise, also a witness for the opponents, will talk about the effects of the loads on highway infrastructure as well as traffic and safety.

"Multiple axles are to be used to spread the weight of the load per Idaho requirements in order to protect the integrity of Idaho roads and bridges," according to a brief filed Friday by Imperial Oil's attorneys in preparation for the hearing.

The biggest of Imperial Oil's megaloads would be the same weight and dimensions as the test module, which is about 490,000 pounds, 24 feet wide and almost 250 feet long, counting push and pull [trucks](#). It is the third-heaviest shipment to use U.S. 12. It and the other oversized loads are being required to pull over every 15 minutes to allow traffic to pass.

Future Imperial Oil shipments would carry Korean-made modules for an Imperial Oil processing plant in the Kearl Oil Sands in Alberta, Canada. The modules would be barged to the Port of Lewiston, where they would be transferred to trailers for the road portion of their journey.

The contested case hearing starts at 8 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time and will be broadcast live at the District 2 office of ITD at 2600 Frontage Road. It's scheduled to last 4 1/2 days, according to the opposition.

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