

Port plan may lead to Yuma rail link

By Jeffrey Gautreaux
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Plans to build a large seaport at Punta Colonet, Baja California — about 130 miles south of Tijuana — could mean that a new rail line would run through Yuma to quickly move cargo from the port to the interior of the United States.

There have been discussions with landowners in the area about property acquisition, but the details, and whether the line will actually be built, remain up in the air.

The line would be used to send containers by rail from the Pacific Coast through Mexico and then north to Yuma to tie into the current Union Pacific tracks that run through the city and to Tucson beyond. A right-of-way agent has been speaking to government and private industry in Yuma about the proposed line — to the dismay of some in the agriculture industry.

The agent declined to comment for the story, directing questions to Chris Peterson, Union Pacific's director of government affairs.

Peterson said the railroad has conducted preliminary studies, but the project remains very uncertain and therefore he did not have any specifics to offer.

"The preliminary study included fact-finding discussions with public and private interests in Arizona," he said.

Bruce Easterday, owner of Easterday Farms, said the agent spoke with him a month ago. The agent has been approaching landowners about purchasing ground for rights of way through a two-year option — which, if accepted, would reserve the land for two years at a fixed price, he said.

Easterday hasn't signed anything and doesn't know of anyone who has. He said the agent alluded to the fact that Union Pacific had the authority to use eminent domain to acquire land for right of way.

"Quite frankly, that irritated me a little bit," he said.

Peterson declined to comment on the use of eminent domain.

"There's a considerable amount of uncertainty that really leaves the door open as to whether a project like this would ever happen," he said.