

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

## Coming through

### Railroad should stay because of historical importance, safe alternatives



BRIENNE PORTER

This week, there will be a series of public forums sponsored by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to gather opinions about the railroad tracks that bisect Texas A&M's campus. While talk of rerouting the Union Pacific-owned trains has gone on for years, the forum is the first definite step in the process of deciding the railroad's fate. On the city of College Station's agenda this year is the objective of minimizing the adverse effects of the railroad, including maintaining safety. The city council should decide not to move the tracks.

Rerouting the railroad tracks that divide West Campus from the main campus would remove a part of College Station's history. As the story goes, College Station's name derived from the only thing that existed in this area — the college. Since there was no real station for the students, the conductor would stop the train and shout "college station!" If the railroad is routed through another town and no longer travels through College Station, future generations will lose an important part of the area's history. College Station should preserve the history of its name as an Aggie tradition.

Many people in favor of rerouting the railroad tracks argue that they interfere with the safety of the community. While it is true that railroads pose some hazard to the community, there are numerous measures that are already in place, or in the process of being built, that reduce the risk to College Station and A&M. At every railroad crossing that intersects a major thoroughfare, crossing arms are lowered when a train approaches. The majority of automobile accidents that occur at railroad crossings are caused when people try to beat the train by driving around the barriers.

There is danger in having the tracks pass through the highly populated part of the community, but driving cars also threatens the public welfare. The city has not decided to make it illegal to drive on city streets.

There are hazards throughout the community and in people's daily lives, but the safety issue that gathers the most media attention in this city is the railroad tracks. The main issue

that should be considered by the powers-that-be in College Station is the one that holds more merit as a threat to the community. Other safety issues, such as bicycle lanes on city streets, are more pressing issues than a set of railroad tracks that has been in place longer than most other hazards.

Another safety concern is students crossing the tracks on foot or bicycle to go to and from West Campus. However, an alternative to crossing the tracks at street level currently exists for students — the pedestrian bridge, or "rainbow," over Wellborn Road at Joe Routh Blvd. While it takes longer at times to use the rainbow, it is a safe alternative to fighting the traffic and trains. When a train is passing through, the bridge is the only pedestrian option.

While this safe-crossing option is already in place, a new way of crossing the railroad tracks and Wellborn Road will be available when the new West Campus parking garage

is built. A tunnel will stretch between the main campus and West Campus. The new tunnel will be a safe and effective way for pedestrians to avoid trains and automobiles while heading to classes.

Yet another drawback to moving the tracks is the money needed to move them. The federal government will contribute some money, but the rest will have to come from local and state funds. This added cost will almost certainly fall on taxpayers. Obviously, if the tracks remain in place, this extra cost would not accumulate. Instead, that money could be spent on the future West Campus garage passageway and other projects the city already has on its budget.

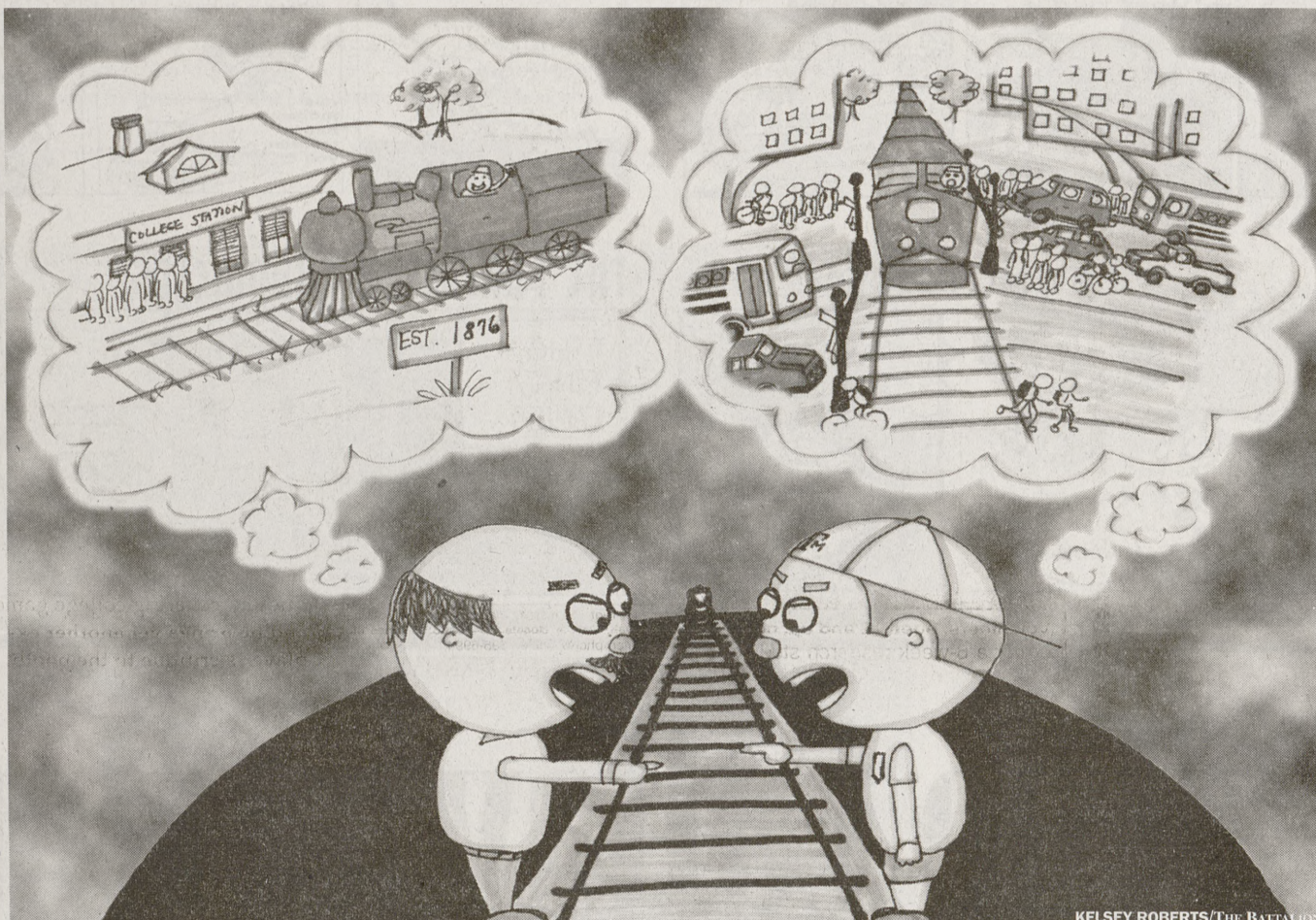
Many people complain about the delays trains cause during the day. Right now, Union Pacific runs approximately 25 trains daily, with the majority running during the night. Further, while a train can delay a stu-

dent traveling to class, professors are usually understanding and will forgive the student for being late because of a train.

Previously, the city proposed a measure that would lower the railroad tracks through Bryan, College Station and A&M to minimize adverse effects, but the voters of College Station defeated the proposal. The citizens of College Station spoke once before, and they wanted the tracks to stay. The MPO is looking to gather public opinion again. The opinion should be the same as before.

When the decision is made concerning the fate of trains traveling through College Station and the A&M campus, the city must decide to recognize the safety measures already in place and save a part of the community's history.

Brienne Porter is a sophomore chemical engineering major.



KELSEY ROBERTS/THE BATTALION

## Bronze Star nominees not worthy of medal honors



MARK PASSWATERS

According to the June 6 edition of the CBS Evening News, the Pentagon is reviewing the awarding of more than 200 Bronze Star Medals to Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps personnel involved in the Kosovo conflict. Concerns arose when it was discovered that few of those nominated for the award were involved in anything that resembled combat. In fact, more than half were not even stationed in Europe.

In an attempt to justify awarding these medals, an Air Force spokesperson said, "In today's changing battlefield, heroes can be found far away from the conflict." What a farce. According to the requirements for the awarding of the Bronze Star — or any other medal recognizing valor — the recipient must show "conspicuous valor in the face of the enemy." Captains who are flying desks in

Missouri while other members of the military do battle half a world away are therefore disqualified.

This arbitrary awarding of medals takes away from the true meaning of the award and is an insult to those who have been given the award with good reason.

In August 1944, Sgt. Daniel Inouye, a Japanese-American, was part of a unit sent to rescue a group of Texas National Guardsmen cut off behind German lines in occupied France. His efforts, which included charging a German machine gun on his own after being shot twice, won him a Bronze Star.

On Dec. 3, 1968, Army Spc. Richard Dennis Randall was killed in action defending members of his unit against an ambush set by the North Vietnamese Army. Spc. Randall was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star with a V for valor.

A few months later, Air Force Sgt. John Passwaters, my father,

was awarded the Bronze Star after he saved the lives of two Marines during a Viet Cong rocket attack on the Da Nang air base. According to his commendation, Sgt. Passwaters, "paying no heed to the risk to his person," knocked the two Marines out of the way before a rocket landed where they had been standing.



TAMARA CUELLAR/THE BATTALION

My father refuses to talk about the incident, claiming that he was just doing his job. Everyone knows he went beyond the call of duty, but apparently just doing one's job

is now enough to qualify for "conspicuous valor" in today's military. How loading bombs onto a B-2 bomber that will fly 8,000 miles to bomb Serbian targets can be considered bravery has yet to be explained.

What personal sacrifices did these stateside warriors make? Did they risk the wrath of their wives by not coming home in time to cut the grass? Did some miss their bowling league on Tuesday night to review satellite photography? Goodness knows, some personnel may have had to miss hot dates to make sure that the aircraft they were working on were properly armed and fueled. This not valorously when one considers that other Bronze Star awards were presented to widows or mothers of the awardees. Being killed in action while performing above and beyond the call of duty is the ultimate sacrifice and example of bravery.

Maybe medals have become the military's way of keeping people in uniform. Perhaps, the reasoning goes, if they are given high

honors for doing their job, they will re-enlist. This will minimize the recruiting difficulties that the military is experiencing.

Here is a better idea: How about paying military personnel a respectable wage? This is the usual practice for people who do jobs that are expected of them.

Handing out awards like the Bronze Star as if they were Social Security checks is an insult. Soldiers who have sacrificed their lives have done so for less.

If the Air Force and other armed services want to make their personnel feel better, they should pay them what they are worth. Being paid a wage that can be earned in the civilian world would be enough incentive for most members of the military to re-enlist.

It also ensures proper recognition for those who received the Bronze Star for showing the "conspicuous valor" the award is supposed to honor.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

## ViewPoints

### O.J. needs to fade away into obscurity

Just when America thought it was safe to watch cable TV, he's back, and he's ticked off. O.J. Simpson, fresh off another 18 holes of chasing "the real killer," called Fox News on the sixth anniversary of his wife's death to confront anchor Shepard Smith and his former sister-in-law, Denise Brown. After a rant in which he called Smith a "liar" and said that Brown wanted to have sex with him, Simpson offered to take a lie detector test to prove his innocence. All that he wanted was \$3 million.

Three million bucks to find out O.J. Simpson's a killer? People can do that for free (this offer does not apply to Marcia Clark).

Simpson should stop selling himself short and go for the gold. Maybe he could ask for \$5 million to go on Jerry Springer. Think of the ratings as hundreds of legitimate citizens attempt to knock the snot out of him. He can show the skills that helped him slice and dice his way through his ... err, opposing defenses.

It has been six years since Simpson probably killed his wife and Ron Goldman (just as Japan probably bombed Pearl Harbor). Simpson thrives on publicity, and he has somehow become front-page news again. "Alleged" double murderers should not be on television, unless they are getting run over by a monster truck.

The best way to deal with O.J. Simpson — outside of putting him in a padded cell with a rabid Mike Tyson — is to ignore him. For such a publicity hound, having society shun him would be a fate worse than death (even though he should find out about that, too). It is time for Simpson to fade into the sunset. This time the media should be smart enough to make sure he does not return.

— Mark Passwaters

### Activites do not warrant risk inquiry

In response to the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse and the subsequent discovery of several lapses in student safety, Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. J. Malon Southerland appointed a risk-management team to assess potential safety problems with other student activities at Texas A&M. The team will comprise students and administrators working together with the staffs of individual clubs, organizations and activities.

While one lesson learned from the collapse and commission was that safety should never be overlooked, the members of this new risk-management team should take precautions to remain realistic about the acceptable level of risk associated with a number of Texas A&M student organizations.

Plainly speaking, a number of student-run and -led activities do involve risks to personal safety.

However, the level of risk involved with, and the amount of safety management required for, these activities is not nearly as dangerous or complicated as bonfire.

Students dehydrate at Replant, and others hit themselves with hammers while participating in The Big Event. But these injuries do not require a risk-assessment team to step in and introduce new regulations.

Other than bonfire, student-run activities are completely safe. Even the newest projects have gone years without raising red flags about potential safety concerns. It was only after bonfire's collapse that student organization's potential safety risks became an issue. The administration has already taken more than enough steps to ensure bonfire continues as a thoroughly safe activity.

Southerland's risk-management team should abandon that spirit of overzealous safety awareness that pervaded the bonfire assessment. The group needs to judge other student groups based on their own risks and how they have been handled so far.

By and large, the student organizations at A&M have not done anything to warrant a risk-management evaluation. While it is important to catch safety hazards before they become problems, Southerland's team should not lose sight of the fact that the risk associated with these organizations is not only manageable, but managed well.

— Eric Dickens

### Bowen neglectful of A&M GLBT community

In response to April Young and Jeanette Simpson's June 27 article.

During the press conference at which the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie Bonfire announced its findings, a reporter asked Dr. Ray Bowen if he would consider any possible legal action against the University before deciding on the future of bonfire.

Dr. Bowen stated that his job was not to

be swayed by the threat of lawsuits, but to look out for the best interests of students.

On June 27, Dr. Bowen stated that his decision to veto the nondiscrimination clause last year was based entirely on the legal risks it would pose.

If Dr. Bowen is scared that disgruntled gay students would sue the University, he is admitting that the University does not treat gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students fairly.

Dr. Bowen has disregarded the gay community at every turn.

He has not fulfilled the promise he made during an appearance on KAMU-TV

several months ago to attend an Allies Advance, which is a workshop at which participants learn about the GLBT community on campus and the needs of GLBT students.

If Dr. Bowen does not sign the nondiscrimination clause this time, he will be spitting in the faces of every gay, lesbian and transgendered student at Texas A&M. And believe me, we are here.

Amy Hinze  
Class of '01

## Mail Call

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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