



January 15, 2013

GPT/Custer Spur EIS
c/o CH2M HILL,
1100 112th Avenue NE Suite 400
Bellevue, WA 98004
comments@eisgatewaypacificwa.gov

RE: Scoping Comments on the Gateway Pacific Coal Export Terminal at Cherry Point

To Whom It May Concern:

Please consider this letter as part of the public record for the Gateway Pacific Terminal coal export project proposed at Cherry Point, Whatcom County, Washington, facility site ID #22237. The impacts of coal export at Cherry Point extend far beyond the terminal, reaching into every community located along the rail line between the coal mines and the export terminal. As a community that will be directly impacted by activity on the rail line to be used for servicing the Cherry Point facility, I respectfully request that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Washington Department of Ecology, and Whatcom County (collectively "the lead agencies") fully disclose and carefully assess the impacts of the Gateway Pacific Terminal on our community.

Pacific International Terminals, a subsidiary of SSA Marine, proposes to export 54 million metric tons of coal annually. This coal that is destined for the proposed Whatcom Terminal, will travel in uncovered rail cars through dozens of communities, including land adjacent to the City of Olympia's McAllister Springs and Well Fields. McAllister Springs and the nearby well fields provide our city with the majority of our drinking water. Aside from the impacts of coal export at and near the terminal, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must examine the impacts of coal trains and the coal export industry on our citizens, local environment, and quality of life. This includes the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of coal export on public health, traffic, existing businesses, public infrastructure, water quality, air quality, agriculture, climate change and quality of life. These impacts are described in greater detail below.

Public Health Impacts

Coal is commonly transported in open top rail cars, contaminating local air quality, infrastructure, open spaces, farms, forestland, streams and rivers with coal dust, chunks of coal, and diesel pollution. The EIS must take a hard look at the impacts coal export, including:

- The public health impacts of increased air pollution from coal dust, which contains heavy metals, including mercury, arsenic, lead and uranium. Exposure to these toxins is linked to a multitude of health problems.
- The EIS must assess the health impacts from coal dust and diesel pollution under various exposures scenarios based on different operational lifetime projections for the Gateway Pacific Terminal.
- Public health impacts from soil contaminated by coal dust and chunks of coal deposited by coal trains – and that could potentially directly affect the Nisqually Aquifer and McAllister Well Fields, upon which many communities, including the City of Olympia, is dependent upon for drinking water.
- Public health impacts from increased car emissions caused by traffic delays from coal trains.
- Public health risks associated with diesel emissions and other pollutants from coal trains.

Climate Change

Burning coal leads to increased emissions of greenhouse gases and climate change. In turn, the EIS must assess the negative impacts to quality of life, public health, and the environment which are associated with climate change. This includes the impacts of climate change in our community; ocean acidification, increased likelihood of reduced snowpack, flooding, summer droughts, and forest fires risk, and quality of coastal and near-shore habitat.

Economic Impacts

A strong economy is vital to the well-being of our community. Increased train traffic has the potential to slow the growth of existing businesses and damage property, thus reducing the likelihood that new businesses will take root in our community due to limitations placed on the trunk lines that serve the City of Olympia. The EIS should analyze:

- The impact of increased train traffic on real estate values, including safety and noise concerns.
- The potential damage that coal dust may cause to other types of property, including crops, homes, cars, and boats.
- The potential impact to businesses along the rail line that may be blocked or experience an interruption in service for significant portions of the day.
- The potential impact to businesses like restaurants that may use an outdoor area and the East Olympia Amtrak passenger terminal which is situated directly on the rail line in question.
- The amount of public expenditures for rail improvements that are solely for accommodation of the coal export rail traffic and the impact this may have on other projects vital to our community's economic well-being.
- I am specifically concerned about rail line traffic in and out of the Port of Olympia and impacts on passenger train travel along the Amtrak Line that services our community and region.

Cumulative Impacts

The lead agencies must assess the cumulative impacts of the Gateway Pacific project and existing rail traffic, as well as projected increases in rail traffic from other coal export proposals. Currently, five ports are considering coal export proposals, which, together, could transport more than 140 million tons of coal through the region. For example, the lead agencies must assess the cumulative impacts resulting from the emissions of greenhouse gasses that would result from the proposed combustion, mining and transportation of coal that would be handled by the proposed coal export facility at Cherry Point. In doing so, the lead agencies must assess the totality of greenhouse gas emissions associated with all of the coal export facilities that are currently proposed for the West Coast, and the lead agencies must not only consider the total emissions but also the resulting impacts to climate change and the associated impacts on human health and natural resources resulting from rising temperatures, changing climatic patterns, rising sea levels, and increasing ocean acidification.

Alternatives Analysis

I urge the lead agencies to complete a robust analysis of alternatives to coal export at Cherry Point, including export of other commodities, the use of the property by other industries, and a "no action" alternative.

Conclusion

The rush of proposed coal export projects in the Northwest present unprecedented threats to our community and way of life. I join other with other local elected officials located between the coal mines in the Powder River Basin and the export terminals in Oregon and Washington and urge the lead agencies to prepare an exhaustive, expansive EIS which accounts for the wide range of direct, indirect, and reasonably foreseeable impacts from coal export on our community. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this EIS for coal export in the Pacific Northwest.

Sincerely,



Stephen H. Buxbaum
Mayor
City of Olympia

cc: City Council Members
City Manager, Steve Hall
Public Works Director, Rich Hoey

cc-13-06-