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**Organization:**

**State:** Washington

**Agency:** Surface Transportation Board

**Initiative:** Tongue River Railroad

**Submission Text**

I live in Whatcom County, Washington, and we are negatively impacted by existing coal trains coming from Montana & Wyoming going to Canada. Coal from the Otter Creek mine that would be served by this rail line would be bound for Canadian coal export terminals. These include the following- 1- Disruption of private & commercial motor traffic caused by excessive delays at RR crossings due to the lengthy (100-120 units) coal trains. More seriously, these crossings delay school buses in the mornings & afternoons. Most seriously, the coal trains, which sometimes STOP at crossings, cause the delay of ambulances & fire department vehicles. 2- Any improvements such as over/underpasses to alleviate these harmful RR crossings must be 95% funded by local governments. Such projects would cost millions of dollars apiece and impose undue burdens on our communities. Indeed, such projects are unaffordable. 3- Noise pollution is a major disturbance along the tracks used by coal trains. Each of the several dozen crossings in the county requires the trains to blow their horns repeatedly. These horns are in the 120-130 decibel range. Studies have proven a wide range of negative health affects including loss of hearing & sleep, increased stress levels & hypertension as a result of repeated exposure to such decibel levels. These injurious exposures affect humans & animals & cannot be fully mitigated. 4- The coal trains are so heavy they need 4 locomotives belching diesel fumes as they travel the 900 some mile route from the coal fields to Canada. They cross the entire south to north expanse of my county laying down harmful air pollution in rural areas & the cities of Bellingham, Ferndale & Blaine. Diesel smoke is a proven carcinogen & the particulate content is known to cause asthma. Children are especially vulnerable to this pollution, which cannot be mitigated. Coal trains pass within 100 yards or less of schools in Ferndale & Custer. 5-Fugitive coal dust escaping from coal cars ( 500 lbs. per car ) degrades the rails due to the abrasive properties of the dust. We have 2 refineries in our county receiving Bakken shale oil trains daily. The dangers of derailment of these oil trains needs no explanation. The coal trains & oil trains share the tracks through here. I am gravely concerned that increased coal train traffic will damage the tracks & cause an oil train accident. I am terrified at the prospect of such a catastrophe happening in my county. Increasing the number of coal trains would invariably increase the harm we are suffering as a result of current coal train traffic. The permits for this railroad should therefore be denied. The proposed Otter Creek mine cannot be served without this railroad. Cancellation of the railroad & its attendant mining operation would spare my county the harm of more coal trains.