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Commenter: Dena Jensen

Organization:

State: Washington

Agency: Surface Transportation Board

Initiative: Tongue River Railroad

Submission Text

I am resending this comment on the Tongue River Railroad Draft EIS because I do not see any record of my comment on your website. I do not know why I would not find it there. I checked both, under individual public comments, and those comments included in documents submitted by a couple organizations I could possibly have sent this comment through. To my recollection, however, this particular comment was sent in a form on your site, which is the way I am sending it today. I will take a screen shot of this so that I will have a record to send you, should my comment not subsequently appear on the appropriate webpage for the Tongue River Railroad Draft EIS. I live in Birch Bay, WA, an area that is the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people. I belong to a group called Save Birch Bay that is in opposition to the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal that would be built approximately 3 miles from my home and would rest on the beautiful shoreline of Xwe'chi'eXen (Cherry Point). Our group has done extensive research on the proposed terminal and the effects of the coal industry from mining, transporting to the Pacific Northwest, shipping and burning overseas. Regarding coal trains, here is some of the information on adverse impacts that we feel cannot be mitigated: Diesel engines produce toxic 2.5 micron diesel particulate emissions that are breathed deeply into the lungs. According to BNSF, each coal car can lose as much as 500 pounds of toxic coal dust en route. Even empty coal cars release substantial coal dust emissions. After studying the medical research, the American Lung Association and over 200 Whatcom County doctors concluded that there is no "safe threshold" of exposure to these toxins. Exposure to these toxins causes increased risk of cancer, cardiac and pulmonary problems including heart attacks, strokes, asthma, and impaired lung development in children and adolescents. Round-the-clock noise from diesel engines would cause inescapable noise pollution. Noise pollution causes cardiovascular disease including high blood pressure and strokes, cognitive impairment and lower academic achievement in children, sleep disturbance, and mental health problems. I oppose construction of the Tongue River Railroad, and urge the STB to take the "no action alternative." The railroad proposes to haul coal from the speculative Otter Creek mine at a time when coal markets are crumbling both domestically and around the world. The Otter Creek mine is clearly a connected impact of the railroad's construction. Otter Creek is the largest proposed coal mine in the United States, and represents 1.3 billion tons of coal that, if mined, would contribute to climate change for the next 55 years. The draft EIS wrongly assumes that there is a domestic coal market for high-sodium Otter Creek coal, and wrongly assumes zero train traffic impacts from construction of a rail line that could transport 18-26 additional coal trains per day. Rail communities between the proposed railroad and Pacific Northwest export terminals would suffer the consequences of dramatically increased coal train traffic, including slashed property values, increased traffic congestion, safety hazards, and air pollution from both diesel exhaust and fugitive coal dust. The TRR and coal export only benefit private coal companies and Asian energy users while it hurts those of us who live along the rail line. Say no to the Tongue River Railroad and if you continue with the EIS process, please throw out the confusing and insufficient Draft EIS you have compiled and start over. Thank you. Sincerely, Dena Jensen Birch Bay, WA