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Submission Text

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My name is Becky Mitchell and I live at 3124 Emilia Circle in Billings, Montana, and I live three houses from the railroad tracks. I live on the West end, in a subdivision of more than 100 people, and we are within the Billings City limits, and the Tongue River Railroad will impact the quality of life for myself and the families in my subdivision, which consist of a lot of young children. There are currently 10 trains per day going through this subdivision. When I first moved there about four years ago, there was one train per day, and now with a projected, and I'll with the low, eight trains in a 24-hour period, that would be at least 18 trains if not more going through this subdivision.

There are serious safety concerns. With the increase in coal train traffic, the number of derailments increases. The train runs by my house on an elevated burn, which is on a curve also, and with the increase in torrential rainstorms, this is just a disaster waiting to happen out here, for the dirt to give way and for the train to come down on top of people's houses. The diesel exhausts of passing trains currently, I work so I'm gone most of the day, but I would say at least two or three times a month that I personally see a coal train parked waiting on the track above my house. I'm assuming it's waiting for the track to be cleared so that it can go ahead and pass. The diesel is emitted into the air, and this is putting the children at risk in the subdivision and the elderly and people with emphysema and asthma.

Noise pollution. I'm unable to carry on a conversation when a coal train passes by. I'm a window opener, I like to have my windows open and I don't really like air conditioning. It's important for me to have windows open, and I can't. I just have to stop talking with people, we wait for the coal train to go by. If we're outside, we have to stop and the coal train goes by. With the increase projected in trains, I may not have any conversations. But it is important to be able to converse, and the high noise levels are related to stress-related illnesses, high blood pressure, sleep disturbances, and noise-induced hearing losses. The other really major thing is devaluation of property values. As the coal trains increase, people's property values will decrease, and that is a real impact on a great amount of people.

I'd like to address, I live on the west end, but I do think it's important to address the issues downtown at the crossings. The north side holds all the emergency services. For them to get to the south side, they have to go at an at-grade crossing, and then you have the backed up traffic and people's lives are put at risk with this situation. The STB does have the power to require the Tongue River Railroad to finance mitigation on these impacts and they do need to take action on that.

All being said, I would say this railroad should not be built, and I would highly recommend no action, no permit.