

Submission Number: *FD-30186-000151*

Received: 8/27/2015 6:36:36 PM

Commenter: Dick Barrett

Organization: Montana Senate

State: Montana

Agency: Surface Transportation Board

Initiative: Tongue River Railroad

Submission Text

Please consider and include in the record the attached letter, which I am submit on behalf of myself and eight other Missoula area members of the Montana Legislature. Thank you.

United States Surface Transportation Board
Washington, D.C.
Via email

To the Board:

We, the undersigned members of the Montana State Legislature, call on the STB to address deficiencies in the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Tongue River Railroad (TRR) project, by releasing a final EIS that thoroughly analyzes potential impacts on Western Montana from increased coal train traffic that is likely to result from building the TRR.

Market forces and major coal companies' own public statements clearly indicate that the primary incentive for opening large new coal mines in Montana would be to export US coal overseas. However, the draft EIS for the TRR project largely ignores impacts on communities west of the proposed rail spur, which would see increased coal train traffic as trains travel back and forth between the project site and the West Coast. We believe the final EIS must do a better job looking at impacts in these "downrail" communities to the west.

The failure to look at Western Montana communities is especially worrying, because some of these towns are subject to special circumstances that make them disproportionately vulnerable to pollution from coal trains. For example, in Missoula the Montana Rail Link (MRL) line passes close to the downtown area and through several densely populated residential neighborhoods where homes are located very close to the tracks and are especially vulnerable to pollution from coal dust and diesel fumes. Similarly, the MRL-operated rail yard and fueling station in Missoula sits literally across the street from residential homes. Coal dust and diesel fumes from rail traffic are already a health concern for many Missoulians, and heavy industrial activity in the MRL yard is a source of air and noise pollution that would be exacerbated by additional coal trains passing through the area.

Common sense suggests that building the TRR will likely lead to more coal trains passing through Missoula and other Western Montana towns, yet the draft EIS does nothing to thoroughly analyze impacts from this traffic. We believe this is unacceptable, and that the deficiency must be addressed in the final EIS. When writing the final EIS, we urge the STB to specifically examine how downrail impacts of building the TRR will affect Western Montana communities, and to fully consider all of the associated health and environmental risks.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sen. Dick Barrett
Rep. Bryce Bennett
Rep. Willis Curdy
Sen. Tom Facey
Rep. Ellie Boldman Hill
Sen. Sue Malek
Sen. Diane Sands
Rep. Tom Steenberg
Sen. Cynthia Wolken

