

Sravasti Abbey

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Ken Blodgett

Surface Transportation Board

Office of Environmental Analysis

395 E Street, S.W.

Washington, DC 20423

July 9, 2015

Subj: Tongue River Railroad, Draft EIS, Docket No. 30186

Dear Mr. Blodgett,

I write today on behalf of all the monastics of Sravasti Abbey, a Buddhist center of learning and practice located near Newport, Washington and in close proximity to the many downline communities in northern Idaho and eastern Washington affected by the proposed Tongue River Railroad and Otter Creek Mine.

We at the monastery have dedicated our lives to the Buddha's teachings and strive to embody the values of compassion, respect for nature, and service to all beings. Because of our values, we eschew the Surface Transportation Board's "No Action Alternative" on the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Tongue River Railroad.

From a global perspective, the Tongue River Railroad will enable more climate-changing coal to be extracted and burned in the United States and abroad. This proposed railroad imperils humanity and all the creatures of our earth. In an age where the impact of advancing climate change is all around us, it is an immoral act to facilitate the mining and movement of this dirtiest of fossil fuels - coal.

From a local perspective, coal's contribution to climate change is not abstract. We live close to the land and know all too well that our winters are shorter, our snow pack is less, our summers are longer and hotter, and wildfire threatens us for more and more weeks each year. And, we know that when rain does come, it is laced with mercury carried on the winds from places like China where Powder River Coal is burned today, with more to be burned if you approve the Tongue River Railroad. In fact, the draft EIS estimates the indirect result of building the railroad and shipping Otter Creek coal to the international market could eventually result in 81 million metric tons of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere annually. At a time when other departments in the Administration are working diligently to reduce polluting emissions and preparing for the December U.N. summit on climate in Paris, approval of the Tongue River Railroad is irrational.

Our closest neighbors are even more affected by the proposed railroad. As you know, the U.S. Department of Transportation has called coal dust a "pernicious ballast foulant." The threat of more coal dust destabilizing track beds has a direct impact on those who live along the Clark Fork River, Lake Pend Oreille, and the Pend Oreille River. Consider the impact of a crude oil train derailment adjacent to our riverine system. Release of

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hundreds of thousands of gallons of Bakken crude into this system will pollute the drinking water for thousands of our neighbors and poison the water for the fish, water fowl, and mammals which rely on fresh water to live. Because many of the recent crude oil train derailments were caused by track issues, it seems unconscionable to approve the Tongue River Railroad.

Finally, the draft EIS downplayed the impact of the Tongue River Railroad on downline communities in western Montana, northern Idaho, and Washington. You failed to hold public hearings in the Inland Northwest. You focused your market analysis on the questionable future use of coal in the U.S. Upper Midwest. And, you asserted in Appendix C, "As the export terminal capacity on the Pacific coast increases...the same amount of rail traffic would flow from the Powder River Basis to the Pacific Northwest, with or without the Tongue River Railroad." With Arch Coal's principle interest in the Otter Creek Mine and with their 38% ownership of the proposed Millennium Bulk terminal in Longview, Washington, we conclude that this mining company fully intends to increase coal traffic through downline communities en route to Asian markets. For the draft EIS to be thorough, our downline communities deserve a full assessment of rail safety, air quality, noise impacts, crossing delays, and environmental justice issues. Without this analysis, your work is incomplete.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, recently reminded us, "Religious leaders have a duty to speak out about climate change." Pope Francis, another respected spiritual leader, has recently called on people to take measures to prevent and remedy global warming. As dedicated followers of the Buddha who care about the future of all beings on our planet, we strongly urge the Surface Transportation Board to take the "No Action Alternative" on the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Tongue River.

Venerable Thubten Chodron

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