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Commenter: Sandy Robson

Organization:

State: Washington

Agency: Surface Transportation Board

Initiative: Tongue River Railroad

Submission Text

Dear Mr. Blodgett and applicable Draft EIS personnel: I live in Birch Bay, Washington, about 1 and 1/2 to 2 miles from the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal (GPT). I have been educating myself about coal, coal mining, coal terminals, the GPT coal export project, and the Millennium Bulk Terminal coal export project since 2011. I understand that it is very likely that the proposed Tongue River Railroad and Otter Creek Mine projects are dependent upon West Coast coal export terminals being permitted and built in order for there to be sufficient demand/customers for the Powder River Basin coal that would be mined at the proposed Otter Creek Mine and transported by the proposed Tongue River Railroad. I heard the recent news that the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council voted unanimously, on September 21, 2015, to oppose the Tongue River Railroad. The Tribal Council cited concerns about damage to tribal culture and the environment. I stand in support of the Northern Cheyenne who have taken a stand against this TRR project. Also, the Missoula City Council passed a resolution on September 21, 2015, asserting that the additional coal trains associated with the Tongue River Railroad (TRR) would have adverse local impacts, and that those impacts have not been addressed and considered in the Draft EIS for the TRR. The current Draft EIS for the TRR is not sufficient and it needs to be re-done. Relating to the preparation of the EIS for the TRR, I do not think it is appropriate for the consultant preparing the EIS for the TRR, which is ICF, to simultaneously be the same consultant preparing the EIS for the Millennium Bulk Terminal project at Longview, WA. The Tongue River Railroad and Millennium Bulk Terminal projects are potentially linked, in that they are likely interdependent, and both projects involve Arch Coal as a permit applicant/partner/investor in the projects. That seems to be a potential conflict of interest to have the same consulting firm preparing the EISs for those two projects. How is that even allowed? Also, many people reviewing the EIS for the TRR say it is confusing and insufficient, missing vital components that should be studied and considered. I strongly oppose GPT and all coal-related projects because no mitigation is possible due to the fact that we already have too many industries and projects that depend on processing materials with toxic components and storing or releasing the toxic elements in some fashion. We cannot afford to approve any more of these projects. The toxic chemicals stored inertly in coal are released when coal is processed. Even if you take those toxic materials out, they have to be put somewhere. We live in an age where we really cannot even afford any storage space for such dangerous items, let alone have them escape by accident, or worse, from negligence by corporations operating coal mines, transporting coal, and storing and shipping coal. I am not sure if you have studied and addressed this in the very lengthy, and what seems to me to be a shoddily-done Draft EIS. I will, however, focus on this one component which is essential and will keep the process short. More coal mining, more transporting materials that release their toxins during transport adds up to more danger; speeding up this potential mass extinction that we are running into head-on. There is ample scientific research to show what trouble we are in here on Earth. We need, and your agency needs, to tell corporations to go back to the drawing board and to begin to propose projects in which partners/investors in those, have a primary focus that is protecting and preserving our sacred lands, waters and life forms. Sandy Robson Blaine, WA