



Bonner County

Board of Commissioners

Cary Kelly

Mike Nielsen

Glen Bailey

December 30, 2014

MEMORANDUM

MISC
Item #1

To: Commissioners**Re:** Request to include North Idaho in the review of the proposed Tongue River Railroad

Description: Coal companies are proposing to ship over 100 million tons of coal per year through three proposed ports in the Pacific Northwest.

This increase in coal train traffic will have a significant impact on quality of life in North Idaho communities by blocking important traffic crossings for hours a day (slowing commerce and delaying emergency vehicles from responding to local emergencies), and increasing the risk of train derailments of all types due to the increased maintenance needs for the tracks.

Local governments will also bear the significant financial cost of any necessary improvements (overpasses, underpasses, at-grade crossing gates and lights, quiet zones, etc.)

The Tongue River Railroad is a proposed new railroad designed to haul coal from the largest proposed new strip mine in the United States (the Otter Creek coal mine in Montana) and connect it to the existing rail line west for export through west coast ports.

The proposed railroad is currently being analyzed by the Surface Transportation Board (STB).

It is both reasonable and prudent for cities, towns, and other representative bodies and officials, to ask the Surface Transportation Board to utilize the open Tongue River Railroad proceeding to ensure that taxpayers are not footing the bill for industry profits by requiring the railroads to pay an increased share of rail traffic mitigation costs.

Distribution: 1 Original to be mailed to:

Daniel R. Elliott, Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
Deb Miller, STB Vice Chair
Ann D. Begeman, STB Member
Victoria Rutson, Director, STB Office of Environmental Analysis

1 Copy to the BOCC Office

A suggested motion would be: **Mr. Chairman based on the information before us I move to approve the letter to the Surface Transportation Board requesting to include North Idaho in the review of the proposed increased rail traffic traversing through Bonner County.**

Recommendation Acceptance: ☒ yes ☐ no

Commissioner Cary Kelly, Chairman

Date: 12/30/14



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December 30, 2014

Daniel R. Elliott, Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

Subject: Request to include North Idaho in the review of the proposed Tongue River Railroad

Chairman Elliott and Members of the Surface Transportation Board,

We write concerning your case regarding the proposed construction permit for the Tongue River Railroad in Montana. It has come to our attention that BNSF rail lines that traverse North Idaho could experience a substantial increase in train traffic exporting coal from the Powder River Basin to proposed West Coast ports. We understand that the construction of the Tongue River Railroad would contribute significantly to this additional traffic, as it would connect the proposed Otter Creek coal mine to the existing rail line.

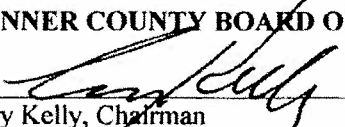
Because these additional coal trains would impact several communities in Bonner County Idaho, We request that the Surface Transportation Board (STB) consider North Idaho in your Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Tongue River Railroad, and consult with those communities as the review process moves forward. We encourage you to hold a public hearing in Sandpoint, Bonner County, where all rail lines through North Idaho converge.

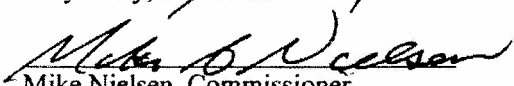
Our constituents have specific concerns related to increased rail traffic generated by the increased transport of coal and oil to the Northwest. As the regulatory agency for the rail system, the STB has a responsibility to examine those concerns and determine whether mitigation is warranted. For instance, local communities cannot afford the costs of expensive infrastructure upgrades to mitigate impacts (e.g. overpasses, underpasses, upgraded crossings).

Please consider, and formally include, the cities of Sandpoint, Bonners Ferry, East Hope and other communities along the affected rail lines in Idaho, as you move forward in the review process for the Tongue River Railroad.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

BONNER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS


Cary Kelly, Chairman


Mike Nielsen, Commissioner


Glen Bailey, Commissioner