

# Will Skagit County power past coal?

Coal companies, seeing little future growth domestically, have a new plan: strip mine coal in Montana and Wyoming, transport it on long coal trains through Skagit County to a massive coal export terminal north of Bellingham at Cherry Point. They plan to haul up to 48 metric tons of coal each year. There are several other coal terminals proposed in Washington and Oregon.

## WHO'S BEHIND THE PLAN?

Out of state companies, including the world's largest coal company Peabody and investors like Goldman Sachs. SSA Marine would manage the port. BNSF would transport the coal on their trains.

## CONGESTION FROM COAL TRAIN TRAFFIC

Communities in and along rail lines, including Conway, Mount Vernon, Burlington, Sedro Woolley, Blanchard/Bow could **see 18 or more coal trains** rolling through town *every day*. This would add more than 3,000 noisy mile-long loaded coal trains traveling through Skagit County rail system *every year*.

Adding just 18 trains to the local area's rail system would mean blocking some crossings by two hours per day. SR-536/Kincaid and SR-538/College are major access to I-5. Additional trains from the Cherry Point operations would have a potential significant impact on the business district and quality life in Mount Vernon (Gibson Traffic Consultants, Inc. Sept. 1/2011). Traffic delays would impact residents to the west in Anacortes as well as those who live in eastern Skagit County.

Increased traffic delays at busy rail crossings would clog commuter traffic and could slow response times for emergency responders.

Added coal train traffic along the Skagit

County rail line would limit access to neighborhoods, schools, business corridors and ferry terminals close to the train tracks. This could drive away investors for new residential, retail and commercial developments in waterfront communities in Skagit County.

## HEALTH IMPACTS FOR SKAGIT COUNTY

*Coal Dust and Train Emissions:* Diesel exhaust and coal dust from coal trains can cause serious long-term health problems like lung and heart disease and cancer. Diesel exhaust is associated with asthma, cardiopulmonary disease and increased incidences of cancer.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad studies estimate up to 500 pounds of coal can be lost in the form of dust from each rail car en route. Coal dust and diesel exhaust from coal trains can cause serious

*(cont)*



*A single slow-moving coal train can obstruct a rail crossing by six minutes or more.*

**PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL K. ANDERSON**



*A coal train travels next to the Skagit River play fields in Burlington where many kids of all ages turn out for sports. The wide ranging health dangers of coal dust include exposure to toxic heavy metals like mercury and increased rates of asthma, especially in children.*

**PHOTO CREDIT: ED GASTELLUM**

long-term health problems like lung and heart disease and cancer. Coal dust would pollute our clean air and water.

**Toxic fish:** Mercury and other pollutants from coal-burning power plants travel from Asia to the West Coast of North America where they poison our air, water, fish and food supply.

**IMPACTS TO PUGET SOUND**

The companies would ship the coal on massive cargo ships. Every year close to 500 some of the world’s biggest cargo ships would navigate our waterways and the already-crowded Straits of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound. This would mean ongoing threats to local communities, fishing grounds, wetlands, waterways and wildlife. Just one accident would be devastating. This would mean ongoing threats to wetlands, waterways and wildlife from potential ship collisions, threatening salmon, orcas and our Sound.

Exporting coal promotes deeper global fossil fuel dependence. It delays the

urgently needed transition to cleaner alternatives. It makes climate disruption inevitable, including extreme flooding and ocean acidification, impacting our shorelines and Puget Sound.

**BAD FOR THE ECONOMY**

Major public ports, such as the Ports of Seattle, Vancouver, Tacoma and Portland have rejected coal export. The proposed sites have potential for hundreds of jobs in light industrial and smart-tech growth instead of being mired in a single-commodity, unpredictable dirty export trade. Increased coal train traffic could lower property values along the rail lines and would create congestion for critical business corridors.

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“We are also concerned about the additional train traffic on the BNSF Bridge over the Skagit River, which is an outdated structure that creates backwater conditions during flood events and has the potential to jeopardize the safety of Skagit County citizens. In addition to concerns about possible lengthy delay at crossings, Skagit County requests that environmental review for this project address impacts to our transportation grid, possible adverse impacts on the County’s emergency access points, and the economic impact of substantial new delays at crossings.”

**SKAGIT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
LETTER TO GOV. GREGOIRE, JULY 28, 2011**

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

**1**

**Call Senators Cantwell and Murray** and tell them they need to demand the Army Corps conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) at Ambre Energy’s Port of Morrow proposal on the Columbia River - the only project without an EIS - because it would impact WA communities. Congressional Switchboard: 202-224-3121.

**2**

**Call WA State Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark** at 360-902-1004 and tell him “please don’t use Washington’s public waters for coal export.”

**3**

**Call Gov. Inslee at 360-902-4111** and tell him it is more important than ever that he protect our communities. Governor Inslee must ensure his state agencies conduct the broadest possible review of the cumulative impacts of all the coal export proposals.

**POWER PAST COAL**

**communities against coal export**

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