



# Pierce County

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July 23, 2012

Ted Sturdevant

Director, Washington State Department of Ecology

P.O. Box 47600

Olympia WA 98504

Brigadier General John R. McMahon

Commander, NW Division

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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The Honorable Jack Louws

Whatcom County Executive

311 Grand Avenue, Suite 108

Bellingham, WA 98225

**RECEIVED**

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**JACK LOUWS  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

Director Sturdevant, Brigadier General McMahon and Executive Louws:

I have been monitoring the coal terminal proposal by Pacific International Terminals, Inc., a subsidiary of SSA Marine, at Cherry Point in Whatcom County. The "Gateway Pacific Terminal" would provide the capacity to ship up to 54 million metric tons of coal per year from the Powder River Basin of Wyoming and Montana to Asia.

I am concerned about the impact of this proposal on the quality of life here. Pierce County is a beautiful place to live, and we cannot take that for granted when projects such as this threaten the core of our prosperity. Here are areas of concern:

**Air Quality:** Pierce County is currently out of Attainment for Particulate Matter 2.5 emissions. Diesel-powered coal trains will have a negative effect on our air quality and our PM 2.5 problem. It is estimated that each coal train will release one pound of coal dust per container per mile. These added particulate matter emissions could cause severe economic and health problems for the citizens of Pierce County. Moreover, 18 long trains each day will cause more idling of vehicles waiting at train stops around Pierce County. This proposal could seriously jeopardize our plans to get back into attainment for PM 2.5.

**Economic Development:** Pierce County's economy is heavily dependent on trade and reliable rail and road transportation infrastructure, especially to and from the Port of Tacoma. Key to keeping the Port of Tacoma and its supporting businesses competitive is unimpeded access in and out of the port area. We have worked for years to remove at-grade rail crossings, to build better access roads in to and out of the port, to ease sharp corners that slow freight trains, and to separate freight rail from passenger rail traffic. Introducing nearly 20 one-mile-long trains into the freight system will slow freight throughout the Port to a crawl, and will have devastating impacts on the road transportation network in the vicinity of the remaining at-grade crossings. The congestion the trains will cause at the Port of Tacoma will have a severe negative impact on the Port's ability to attract new business to the port facilities and the surrounding industrial area,



Director Sturdevant, Brigadier General McMahon and Executive Louws  
July 23, 2012  
Page 2

and make our years of effort and investments ineffective. Further, the problem of air quality non-attainment due to PM 2.5 is already becoming an issue when we are competing for new businesses. The additional environmental review required and associated uncertainty in the entitlement process has already led some companies to locate elsewhere. Worsening air quality will exacerbate this issue and cause more companies to look past us and locate or expand in other areas. In addition, quality of life is an important consideration for retaining our existing businesses and attracting new ones. Traffic congestion and increased air pollution will be difficult barriers to overcome.

**Human Health:** Coal and diesel are extremely hazardous to public health. Many of the communities along the railroad are already exposed to higher than normal levels of pollutants. Washington State has worked hard to move away from coal-fired energy because of the negative health effects and the carbon footprint associated with these plants.

**Recreation:** The release of coal dust at Chambers Creek Regional Park could make the park a less enjoyable facility for regional users. The coal trains could negatively impact the reputation of Chambers Bay Golf Course, especially if it prevents the United State Golf Association from holding future U.S. Open championships after 2015. That would cost Pierce County more than \$150 million in economic benefit for each Open.

**Transportation:** Coal trains will slow traffic at crossing points, including the Steilacoom Ferry Dock which is operated by Pierce County. We might have to make drastic changes to our ferry schedules, which adversely affects the residents of Anderson and Ketron islands and the state staff on McNeil Island. These trains also could negatively affect Sound Transit's efforts to move people around the South Sound.

**Water Quality:** Pierce County is committed to working to clean up Puget Sound for generations to come. Much of the rail line through Pierce County follows the Puget Sound near shore. Coal dust is a toxic pollutant and is harmful to listed species in Puget Sound. Water quality will also be negatively affected by the ocean acidification of increased coal burning in Asia.

**Home Values:** Many of the homes along these rail lines will likely suffer a decline in value if this project moves forward. In these tough times when many property owners are already underwater, this is one more potential negative for the local housing market.

I respect a jurisdiction's interest to develop jobs. But as you can see, we have serious concerns about the negative impact this coal export facility will have on Pierce County and the entire region. This seems like a short-term plan that does not move Washington State towards a cleaner and stronger economy.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these concerns. If you have any questions, please contact me or Pierce County Sustainability Manager Ryan Dicks at 253-798-8603 or [rdicks@co.pierce.wa.us](mailto:rdicks@co.pierce.wa.us).

Sincerely,



Pat McCarthy  
Pierce County Executive