



## **CITY COMMISSION OFFICE**

**City of Helena  
316 N. Park Avenue  
Helena MT 59623  
(406) 447-8410**

June 7, 2012

Brigadier General John McMahon, U.S. Army  
Commander and Division Engineer  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Northwestern Division  
P.O. Box 2870  
Portland, OR 97209

**Subject: Request to consider potential impacts on the City of Helena during environmental review of coal export terminal projects**

Dear BGen McMahon:

It has come to the attention of the Helena City Commission that the development of one or more proposed coal-export terminal projects in Washington or Oregon may result in a substantial increase in train traffic through our community. We respectfully request that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers take the potential effects of this increased traffic through Helena into account when conducting an environmental review of these proposals.

By way of background, Helena lies at the base of one of two rail lines that pass over the Continental Divide in the northern Rockies. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) railroad, more recently leased and operated by Montana Rail Link (MRL), has been a vital part of Helena for over 120 years and both have always been good neighbors in dealing with the City of Helena. However, we are concerned about our ability to accommodate a significant increase in rail traffic. We have heard varying estimates of the increases in rail traffic likely to result from the development of one or more coal ports. About 15 trains per day currently pass through Helena. While estimates of the additional rail traffic cover a wide range, any increase in rail traffic through the community will exacerbate existing problems.

The BNSF/MRL railroad line bisects Helena with crossings at eight streets and Interstate 15. Only two of these crossings and the freeway have grade separations. One of Helena's busiest arterial routes, Montana Avenue, lacks a grade separation and traffic delays there have been an issue in Helena for decades. Neither the City of Helena, nor the Montana Department of Transportation, currently has the funds necessary to construct additional grade separations. A substantial increase in rail traffic would greatly exacerbate these delays and adversely affect transportation in Helena.

We are also concerned about possible impacts to air quality from increased rail operations and increased idling by cars and trucks waiting at the crossings lacking grade separation- especially during wintertime air inversions.

Another concern is the noise from train horns. Citizens have long been complaining of train noise and requesting safety improvements to railroad crossings which would eliminate the requirement for trains to sound their horns. With a substantial increase in train traffic, this problem will significantly worsen. Again, we lack funding to address the issue.

We ask the Corps to consider these potential effects on Helena in the course of evaluating the indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed coal-export facilities. The City of Helena stands ready to assist with this process in any way.

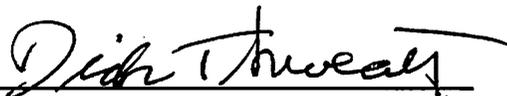
Sincerely,

---

James E. Smith  
Mayor

---

Daniel Ellison  
Commissioner



---

Dick Thweatt  
Commissioner



---

Matthew Elsaesser  
Commissioner



---

Katherine Haque-Hausath  
Commissioner

Courtesy copy:  
Governor Brian Schweitzer  
Senator Max Baucus  
Senator Jon Tester  
Representative Dennis Rehberg  
Burlington Northern Santa Fe  
Montana Rail Link