

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

July 3, 2012

Paula J. Hammond, P.E.
Secretary
Washington State Department of Transportation
310 Maple Park Avenue, SE
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Secretary Hammond:

I write to request your assistance in evaluating proposals for new bulk commodity export terminals in Washington state. As you may know, four companies currently have permit applications pending before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for new export terminals that will primarily serve to export coal from the Powder River Basin to Asia. If approved, these export facilities would dramatically increase the coal exporting capacity in Washington state, from just over five million tons last year to over 100 million tons annually according to some estimates. Combined with export terminals in Oregon, over 150 million tons of coal per year could potentially make its way through various parts of our state's transportation system.

The potential effects of expanding coal exports on our rail, roadway, and waterway transportation systems have generated considerable concern and questions within the communities that could be negatively impacted. For instance, if new coal export terminals significantly increase rail traffic, roadway improvements in several Washington towns and cities may be necessary to minimize traffic flow disruptions to our road and ferry systems and maintain safety and mobility within heavily-used transportation corridors. The additional rail traffic could also impact freight mobility, adding further congestion to our intermodal transfer centers and ports. Understanding the scale and scope of the potential impacts on transportation systems across Washington state is critically important, particularly when considering multiple concurrent proposals for export terminals.

Some estimates suggest that these impacts may be significant and costly to mitigate, further straining already tight state and federal budgets. To begin understanding and planning for the acquisition of any necessary federal resources, I would very much appreciate your help in analyzing the following questions:

- If one or more of these proposed export terminals were built, how many additional carloads, trains, and tons of freight would be likely each year? How long are these additional trains likely to be? And how do these increases compare to existing and historical freight rail traffic?

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- Are there specific bottlenecks for roads, rails, and ports that would likely become further congested and require additional investment? I understand that recent state studies already show significant rail capacity constraints on a number of critical segments including the track from Everett to Blaine, the central Puget Sound, the Columbia Gorge, and “the funnel” at Spokane.
- What public infrastructure investments, including railroad crossing and safety measures, would be needed to ensure communities are not adversely impacted? Does the weight of bulk commodity shipments cause relatively more wear and tear on railways necessitating more frequent maintenance? Who would likely bear the cost of each of these investments -- the federal government, the state government, municipalities, or the commodity shipper?
- What would be the impact of these proposals on the Washington State Ferry system, and what operational or infrastructure improvements would be necessary to ensure ferry users are not unduly impacted? Would increased shipping traffic create congestion and endanger safety within our already busy shipping lanes?
- What would be the impact of these proposals on Amtrak *Cascades* or freight trains carrying perishable goods, and what operational or infrastructure improvements would be necessary to ensure these users are not unduly impacted?
- Will rail capacity upgrades be required to expand double tracking and siding? Is it likely, or are there specific examples of where such upgrades could impact other planned public investments?
- Will additional train traffic at busy rail crossings increase traffic delays and hinder access to neighborhoods, schools, and businesses? If yes, could these traffic delays increase the likelihood of collisions hazards or impede emergency responders’ response?

Thank you for your consideration of this request. While these bulk commodity export terminals would generate much-needed new jobs in Washington state, we need to better understand what investments and impacts these terminals would have on our state’s transportation system and communities across the state, from Spokane to Puget Sound. Our constituents need this information to be able to evaluate these proposals prudently and anticipate any mitigation measures that may be required.

I very much appreciate and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maria Conquest". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.