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Bellingham, WA 98225
January 20, 2013

EIS Co-Lead Agencies for the Gateway Pacific Terminal proposal
c/o CH2MHill
1100 112th Ave NE, Suite 400
Bellevue, WA 98004

**Re: Impacts on Economic Activity and Growth Associated with Local
Quality of Life, Healthfulness of Lifestyle, and Attractiveness to
Businesses and Tourism**

Dear EIS Officials:

By means of this letter, I am requesting that the scope of the Environmental Impact Study, mandated by both SEPA and NEPA, include an evaluation of the likely and foreseeable adverse impacts on the prosperity of Bellingham and Whatcom County that may arise from the *perceived* and *actual* decrease in quality of life created by the transport of up to 48 million metric tons of coal cargo by rail and marine vessel through the region. Put simply, this project may harm the region's economic competitiveness by undermining a well-known reputation as a good place to live, own a business, and to visit for enjoyment and recreation.

In particular, a thorough EIS study of these adverse impacts should take into account the fact that *the effects of a damaged reputation are real* and potentially quantifiable, even if they are based on subjective and intangible personal judgments about healthfulness, attractiveness, and quality of experiences and enjoyment. Many of the most attractive employers are also among the most mobile and flexible. Much the same can be said about some of the most valuable and highly-trained employees and professionals. How will the effects of GPT's operation affect the business location decisions of current and prospective future employers? How will it affect the location choices of current and prospective future employees?

Personal Perspective

As an elected City Council member for Bellingham, I have chosen to serve on the City's Tourism Commission, as chair of the Lodging Tax Advisory Commission, and as ex-officio board member of the Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism bureau. This experience has given me some appreciation for the important role that quality of life and our natural beauty plays in supporting tourism as a *\$555 million* local economic driver. In addition, the qualities that bring visitors to the region also attract and retain year-round and lifelong residents, businesses, and permanent retirees. Quality of life is consistently at the top of the list for why Bellingham and Whatcom County succeed and thrive. How will this project affect that?

Specific Scoping Comments

In particular, I believe that the scope of the EIS should address the following questions and issues:

1. How will the increased rail and marine shipping traffic, carrying coal and maybe other bulk commodities, affect the reputation, attractiveness, and vitality of Bellingham's visitor and tourist industry? Put simply, coal trains are perceived to be, and to a significant extent are, dirty, noisy, and unpleasant intrusions into an environment known for its natural beauty. This unwelcome intrusion may affect the recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts, as well for people interested in more relaxed enjoyment of the natural sights and sounds of the Pacific Northwest.

As background, let me provide a few facts to indicate the possible magnitude of the impact. According to 2012 estimates by Bellingham Whatcom Tourism, out-of-area visitors are responsible for contributing over \$555 million dollars to the local economy per year. *Outside* magazine named Bellingham as one of the Best Places to Live for outdoor enthusiasts. In particular, the magazine boasted that "Bellingham offers back-door access to the San Juan Islands and Puget Sound," particularly for kayakers putting in on Bellingham Bay.

The increased cargo rail traffic associated with the operation of the Gateway Pacific Terminal will have a likely adverse impact on Bellingham's enjoyment by visitors and residents alike for a simple reason: Every single access point from Bellingham to the water is on the west side of the BNSF tracks that run the length of the coast. There are literally dozens of state, county, port authority,

and city operated parks and recreational areas on the “wrong side” of the tracks.

In this context, it is important to take note of the findings of a June 2010 report prepared for Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism by Dean Runyon Associates. Among the key findings, *1 out of every 3 first-time visitors* to Bellingham go to Boulevard Park and/or the Taylor Avenue over-water walkway. It should be noted that, according to City of Bellingham counts, thousands of people visit Taylor Ave dock every day, over ten thousand *daily* during the summer months. Similarly, 1 out of 4 first time visitors to Whatcom County go to Larrabee State Park just south of Bellingham. On both of these cases, the public parks are immediately adjacent or are actually bisected by the BNSF main line. The trains literally run right through the park, and anyone who wishes to approach the water must cross from the inland side of the track to the shoreside of the tracks. How will the coal rail traffic affect the experience of, and access to, these parks? How will these effects impact the general experience and attractiveness of Bellingham to visitors and residents?

2. How will the increase rail traffic affect the reputation and attractiveness of Bellingham as a good community for new residents, new businesses and entrepreneurs, and retirees? Quite simply, Bellingham’s vitality is supported by its high quality of life and equally by its reputation for quality of life.

The evidence of a reputation for a good quality of life is everywhere, and Bellingham has made numerous “top ten” type of lists. Among the many examples, *Sunset* magazine named Bellingham as one of the “West’s best places to live,” drawing particular attention to over 60 miles of multi-use trails within city limits, such as the famous Taylor Avenue over-water walkway on Bellingham Bay. The tag line offered by *Sunset* was “play year-round,” and highlighted kayaking specifically. Similarly, *Money* magazine has listed Bellingham – “tucked between the Puget Sound and Cascade Mountains” with a “downtown harbor, [from which] boats depart regularly for the nearby San Juan Islands” – as one of the top 10 places in the country for enjoyable retirement. More recently, *CNNMoney* awarded Bellingham a similar honor as one of top 25 places to retire. Bellingham was also recently named as a “boomtown” for tech startups by *Inc.* magazine, in large part because it is seen as a “lifestyle choice” city.

Concluding Comment

Through enlightened effort and a fortunate natural geography, Bellingham and Whatcom County have earned a reputation as green, clean, health place to live. Given the foreseeable impacts of noise, traffic, infrastructure costs, and health risks, how will GPT project affect Bellingham's future? Given the foreseeable physical separation of Bellingham resident from the shoreline, by greater rail traffic and additional rail siding, how will the GPT project affect Bellingham's future? Answers to these questions should be made available to decision makers and the community as part of the EIS scoping process.

Respectfully,
Michael Lilliquist