

How Coal Trains will Severely Impact the City of Edmonds submitted by Val Stewart Edmonds Planning Board 12/13/12

The City of Edmonds is studying the potential local traffic and safety impacts of this proposal. An increase in coal trains running through downtown Edmonds would increase delays at railroad crossings by between one and three hours per day by 2026, according to a Seattle Department of Transportation commissioned study. This study suggests that 18 coal trains per day, each one more than a mile long would pass through our town. These delays would increase police and fire response times for emergencies in the affected areas. The Ferry dock is located on the shoreline side of the tracks at grade. The addition of these long and numerous coal trains daily will seriously impact the loading and offloading of the ferry. Daily gate down times at railroad crossing would increase with coal train operations depending on the length of train and how fast it is traveling. There are residences, businesses, industry, parks including the underwater park and a nature preserve, the Port of Edmonds and our Senior center on the shoreline side of the tracks as well. Blocked train crossings affect response time for fire responses, technical rescue groups, hazardous materials responses, and emergency medical responses where rapid response times are especially important. We have two downtown crossings which receive high volumes of motorized and pedestrian traffic on a regular basis. Within the last 4 months, downtown Edmonds has experienced the repercussions of two incidents involving trains where safety and emergency vehicles were not able to cross for hours. One was a stalled train and the other was a train truck collision. These types of occurrences are likely to happen much more often with increased volume of heavy and long trains carrying coal. We need to make sure that we are protecting our local economy and our shoreline environment. The Environmental Protection Agency should ask the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct an area-wide study that would include livability and impacts on small towns along the rail route. We need a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement to help inform policy makers on this proposal.

For Edmonds, this would be an experiment on how much impact our marine ecosystem could withstand before irreversible affects to the food chain from the bottom up are realized. Hard studies on pollution emissions, dust, noise and vibration need to be conducted. Edmonds has one of the last remaining estuarine marshes along the Puget Sound Shoreline. It has already been severely compromised by human degradation so far and we are now doing a study to see how we can restore habitat for salmon. We're going in the wrong direction here. Let's tap our creative ingenuity and compassion as humans to come up with solutions that are in harmony with nature. No one can dispute the negative health impacts of burning coal or the cumulative exposure to toxins that workers will be subject to when processing it on both ends.... then there are the global effects on climate and atmosphere. Short term solutions to our energy issues are not the answer to our consumptive lifestyle. I ask the question, what are your values? Is making money at the expense of public safety and the health of our citizens and the environment worth the risk?