

Scoping Hearing 12.12.2012 Coal Train Proposal(s)

My name is Bruce Johnson. I own property in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The property address is 62 Puzzled Woman Road, Washougal, WA 98671, and it is located about a mile east of Cape Horn.

First of all I like thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. And I'd also like to say that it's very difficult to assess the degree of potential impacts without knowing exactly how many train trips could or would occur on daily basis. And I stress the fact that these trips will be daily.

It's been reported that there could be up to seven different proposals, each with a different number of possible trips. Since it appears no agency is examining and assessing these separate proposals in the aggregate, it is difficult to determine what the combined impacts would be in the future. Each separate proposal may seem to have minimal impacts by itself. But added together, the combined impacts will be greater than the individual proposals.

Together with our neighbors, my wife and I are concerned about potential adverse impacts on the 80-mile scenic gorge. It's my opinion, both personally and professionally that these multiple proposals to allow coal trains to pass through the Gorge may violate the development guidelines established by the bi-state gorge commission.

At the micro scale what concerns me the most is the fact that my house is located 125 feet from the existing rail tracks. Currently about 20-24 trains pass by my place on a daily basis. I can see and hear the trains quite clearly and distinctly.

It's been stated in print that one of proposal could add 9 trips a day. Another proposal estimates another 18 trips. That adds to 27 daily trips. So adding existing trips to potential trips suggests a possible total of 51 to 78 daily trips.

The math works out to a trip every 28 minutes, or perhaps a trip as frequent as every 18 minutes, if the estimate of 54 trips is accurate. And that's assuming they're spaced out evenly, which I doubt would be the case. Having and hearing that many trains pass within 125 feet of my home is unreasonable to me. And I'm only speaking about one property amongst many that are located near the rail tracks.

What we really need to know is how many households are within sight and earshot of the rail corridor both for the 80-mile gorge area and the entire 1100-1200 mile rail corridor or corridors under consideration.

In many ways the rail corridor is similar to a freeway corridor. When freeway corridors are proposed we require EIS's – Environmental Impact Statements. So why isn't an EIS required in this instance?

I'm also dismayed by the fact the Columbia River Gorge Commission has not taken a position on the coal train issue. The commission and staff, in their wisdom, set forth a set of development regulations designed to protect the visual and scenic beauty in the gorge. These regulations apply to all proposed structures outside of municipalities. In addition to siting criteria and mitigation measures that sometimes requires landscape screening to hide proposed structures from key viewpoints and scenic features, the color of proposed structures are also regulated. You can't paint your house white, red or any other color that sticks out in the landscape.

When we had our home built ten years ago, the only acceptable color was dark gray. The color was so dark I had to use black paint on the doors and window trim to achieve some contrast. Of course the roof is also black. The regulators wanted the building to become a "shadow" in the landscape.

These existing regulations apply to fixed objects, and I would hope that these same regulations would apply to moving objects like rail cars. I'd like to see how one could make a mile-long train into a shadow.

Finally, access to the river is important to our neighbors and us. We frequently cross the tracks to a local peninsula and secluded cove in order to fish, swim, hike and enjoy close up views of the riverscape. Frequent daily train trips would limit our access to the river.

Additionally, in our immediate neighborhood off Riverside Drive and the surrounding area between SR 14 and the Columbia River, there are a few properties that need to cross the tracks in order to access their property and homes. And I'm sure within the Gorge Area and along the proposed 1100-1200 mile corridor; this increased rail traffic would interfere with movement of wildlife, vehicular traffic and pedestrian access.

Since noise and visual impacts as well as other important potential impacts like air pollution are of critical concern to the public interest as well as private landowners living next to the rail corridors, I also believe it is imperative to have a government body or agency initiate and coordinate a comprehensive EIS that

includes all proposals involving the shipment of coal through the Pacific Northwest.

This study should also address the big picture. How much coal is in the ground? What is the long-term demand for coal globally? How long would the coal trains use these transport corridors? And what is the maximum capacity of the proposed rail corridor? Would it ever be necessary to add another rail line to increase capacity? I want to see an EIS so an informed decision can be made.

Thank you.