

To: The Health Impact Project
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & The Pew Charitable Trusts
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Re: **San Juan County Board of Health Support for an Independent Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for increased impacts of shipping coal in Washington State**

This letter expresses the strong support of the San Juan County Board of Health for the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for the evaluation of the possible human health and environmental consequences if the Gateway Pacific Terminal (GPT) project is approved for construction. We ask that you fund this important project.

We feel it is our duty as local officials to ensure that the current and future health of our community is protected, and we believe it is vital that major decisions with potentially large and complex implications are made in light of multiple sources of high-quality information. An independent HIA will fill an important and unique niche in the range of information being gathered. At Cherry Point there will be roughly 500 bulk cargo ships almost 1000 feet long. These will traverse the waters of San Juan County, translating into 1000 ingress/egress passages through the Cherry Point Aquatic Reserve and around the San Juan Islands. In addition to the ships the ingress and egress of tug boats - usually two per ship each way will also be added to the already congested waterways. That adds up to 2000 passages per year of these very powerful tugs, many 100 feet long with very powerful engines.

What will be the effect of these 3000 passages through the Cherry Point Aquatic Reserve and the San Juan Islands for both human health and environmental contamination? What will be the impact on herring, salmon, orcas, eel grass not to mention impacts on tourism and the local economy of the San Juan community?

San Juan County has no decision-making authority over the GPT permit. Rather, we have been working to ensure that our colleagues on the Whatcom County Council will have the broadest range of valuable input available to them as they decide. One way to accomplish this is to support and bring forward relevant and credible information which will supplement and complement rather than duplicate Whatcom County's mandated Environmental Impact Study (EIS) process.

Background. The proposed GPT project at Cherry Point in Whatcom County, Washington, if built, will enable the export of bulk commodities, overwhelmingly sub-bituminous coal, from the western U.S. to markets in the Asia. GPT would be the largest coal shipping

terminal ever operating in North America – at full build out about 50 million tons annually¹ – and would result in a marked increase in train traffic across our state and more than double the rail traffic through many cities and towns throughout the state, as well as greatly increased marine shipping traffic in our regional waters. Understandably, the proposal has generated significant local, regional, and national attention.

Many concerns have been expressed about the potential impacts of this project on our economy, and our environmental and community health. Among those concerned has been a group of over 200 physicians, representing nearly half of the doctors within Whatcom County, have over the past year reviewed the available medical literature on the potential health impacts of the project, and they have concluded that a formal, independent Health Impact Assessment needs to be performed in order to adequately evaluate the impacts on human health of the proposed project and of the rail and shipping traffic it would generate.

The people of San Juan County are faced with a major decision. We need answers, not unfounded debate and speculation. We need to know the true costs and benefits, the risks and potentials, for this unprecedented shipping terminal project. People on all sides – advocates and detractors, the project applicant SSA Marine, the Sierra Club which opposes it, and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, to name a few – all agree that more and better information is needed, but few can provide it.

This July, the Bellingham City Council unanimously passed Resolution 2012-22, which called upon county, state, and federal agencies to conduct a full evaluation of all potential, cumulative on- and off-site impacts of the GPT project. In particular, we requested “a comprehensive Health Impact Assessment be conducted by a separate and qualified third-party contractor in order to analyze potential impacts to the health and welfare of the citizens of Bellingham including impacts from diesel emissions from trains and ships, coal dust, noise and the potential for increased rail/car and rail/pedestrian accidents.”

We are aware that CH2M Hill has been contracted to supervise the county’s EIS process. Although CH2M Hill is an internationally recognized engineering consulting firm, they have limited experience in health impact assessments and will be relying upon others to conduct a limited review. Therefore, an independent and objective assessment performed to the best standards is very important.

¹ SSA Marine has a contract with Peabody Coal for 48 million metric tons, which is just under 53 million US tons.

SAN JUAN BOARD OF HEALTH, signed 20th of September 2012



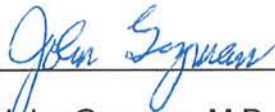
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