



Legislation Text

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A MOTION expressing deep concern about the serious potential impacts of new coal terminals in Oregon and Washington and urging a comprehensive environmental review of the impacts of proposals for new terminals, including the associated transport and burning of coal.

WHEREAS, mounting evidence demonstrates the negative human health impacts of coal mining, processing, transporting and combustion, and

WHEREAS, the burning of coal produces the highest greenhouse gas content of any fuel and accelerates climate deterioration, and

WHEREAS, the state of Washington officially recognizes the negative economic, public health, and environmental impacts of climate change on this state, in both chapter 80.80 RCW and Executive Order No. 0905, and

WHEREAS, because of these environmental and health risks, Washington state is taking steps toward reducing American dependence on coal-fired power, including the 2011 passage of the TransAlta Energy Transition Bill, Chapter 180, Laws of Washington 2011, making possible the retirement of the state's last coal-fired power plant by 2025, and

WHEREAS, there are currently proposals to significantly expand the production of coal on federal lands in the Powder River basin, straddling Wyoming and Montana, for export to Asian economies and

WHEREAS, the federal government has not done a comprehensive review of the environmental impact of proposed coal leases of federal lands or analysis of the fair market value the federal government should receive from coal extraction on federal lands, and

WHEREAS, the economic viability of expanded coal production in the Powder River basin largely depends on the export of coal by rail through the Pacific Northwest, and

WHEREAS, there are currently three proposed coal export terminals in the Pacific Northwest of the United States: the Gateway Pacific terminal north of Bellingham, Washington; the Millennium Bulk Terminals in Longview, Washington; and the Morrow Pacific Terminal in Boardman, Oregon, and

WHEREAS, the operation of the proposed coal export terminals at expected capacity would nearly double the amount of coal exported by the United States, and

WHEREAS, building new coal export terminals in Washington and Oregon will cause significant impacts on air, water, public health, climate pollution and transportation and

WHEREAS, coal is commonly transported via open-top rail cars that allow the spread of coal dust and chunks of coal as well as increased diesel emissions, and

WHEREAS, it is anticipated that new coal export terminals in Western Washington will result in an increase in coal train traffic of at least eighteen additional loaded and unloaded coal trains per day, each approximately one and one-half miles long, through King County including the cities of Seattle, Auburn, Kent, Renton and Skykomish, which could impact the capacity for future passenger rail, and resulting in significant delays of between one to three hours per day at at-grade crossings in King County, increasing traffic congestion and causing delays for cars and buses, and

WHEREAS, adverse public health impacts from building new terminals in Washington and Oregon could include: impaired respiratory functions resulting from diesel particulate matter associated with increased train traffic and coal dust; exposure to mercury and other heavy metal pollution from open pit coal trains; noise exposure along the train route; and increased frequency of long trains at rail crossings, with the potential to delay emergency medical response times and increase vehicle-train accidents, and

WHEREAS, the adverse water quality impacts from building new terminals in Washington and Oregon could include degradation to the aquatic environment adjacent to the terminals as well as the impacts of coal

and dust emissions and associated mercury and heavy metal pollution on water quality, habitat and listed species along the rail corridor route, and

WHEREAS, the significant increase in coal trains could result in significant negative impacts to our local economy, mainly through delays in both current and future freight and passenger traffic. In King County, key industries like aerospace, container shippers, agriculture and shippers rely on the rail corridor to move parts, commodities and finished products and adding coal rail traffic of this magnitude could impact this commerce, and

WHEREAS, a recent property valuation report concluded the proposed increase in coal trains could result in significant diminution in property value in areas near or adjacent to the rail tracks, and

WHEREAS, many of the areas closest to the rail lines in King County where coal train traffic to the proposed coal export terminals would travel include high percentage of minority and low-income populations, who will be disproportionately affected by impacts from these proposals, including traffic, air pollution, health risks and noise, and

WHEREAS, the new coal proposals would directly support a huge quantity of coal burning in China and other Asian countries. Burning the coal associated with these proposals would result in more than two hundred million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent greenhouse gas emissions annually, roughly equivalent to twice of all emissions produced in Washington state, and

WHEREAS, burning coal releases mercury into the environment which then enters the food chain. Mercury exposure is associated with impaired development in fetuses, infants and children. Asian coal burning contributes to about ten percent of the mercury currently deposited in the United States, and

WHEREAS, many cities, tribes and organizations have expressed their opposition or strong concerns relating to new coal terminals in Washington and Oregon, including: the cities of Seattle, Shoreline, Edmonds, Marysville, Snohomish, Mount Vernon, Snohomish, Washougal, Camas, Vancouver and Olympia, Washington; the cities of Portland and Eugene, Oregon; the Lummi Nation, Tulalip Tribes and Yakama Nation; Climate

Solutions, Washington Environmental Council, the Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation and more than one hundred environmental and community organizations; the Kent and Burlington Chambers of Commerce; the Ports of Skagit and Skamania; the Chinatown/International District Business Association; First & Goal; and and the Seattle Art Museum, and

WHEREAS, on July 31, 2013, the Washington state Department of Ecology announced that the scope of environmental review of the Gateway Pacific terminal north of Bellingham will be broad and include an analysis of greenhouse gas emissions of the end use of the transported coal, a statewide assessment of the impact of added train traffic to serve the Gateway Pacific coal terminal, an assessment of cargo ship operations beyond Washington waters, an assessment of how the project would affect human health and an examination of the impact of additional shipping on whales and other marine animals in the Salish sea and its islands, and

WHEREAS, the scoping period for the environmental review for a proposed coal export terminal near Longview, Washington, is from August 16, 2013, to November 18, 2013. During that period, comments to assist in a decision of what impacts to analyze in an environmental impact statement will be gathered, and

WHEREAS, the United States Army Corps of Engineers has not committed to a conducting a comprehensive environmental impact statement of the proposed coal export terminal near Boardman, Oregon, and has instead reported it will conduct a more limited review referred to an environmental assessment, which is typically much briefer and offers few opportunities for public comment than an environmental impact statement, and

WHEREAS, the United States Army Corps of Engineers has not committed to addressing the area-wide cumulative impacts analysis related to these three proposals, and

WHEREAS, King County has been a national leader in addressing climate change including reducing greenhouse gas emission from its operations, generating renewable energy, collaborating with other local governments reduce greenhouse gas in the region, promoting clean jobs and demonstrating clean energy technologies that promote sustainable global economic development, and

WHEREAS, King County's Strategic Plan establishes the county's core goals of protecting public health, safeguarding water and air quality, reducing climate pollution, meeting the growing need for transportation services and facilities, and supporting a strong and diverse sustainable economy;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The council is deeply concerned about the serious potential impacts of new coal export terminals in Washington and Oregon on transportation, public health, climate pollution, water and air quality, marine animals in the Salish sea and its islands and minority and low-income populations.

B. The council recognizes the importance of the region's railway network as a foundational element of King County's manufacturing and shipping economy, as well as an environmentally responsible means of moving passengers and high-value freight.

C. The council commends the Washington state Department of Ecology and Whatcom county for their recent decision to conduct a broad environmental review of the proposed Gateway Pacific coal terminal, including an analysis of greenhouse gas emissions of the end use of the transported coal, a statewide assessment of the impact of added train traffic to serve the Gateway Pacific coal terminal, an assessment of cargo ship operations beyond Washington state waters, an assessment of how the project would affect human health and an examination of the impact of additional shipping on whales and other marine animals in the Salish sea and its islands.

D. The council urges state and federal agencies to conduct a full environmental review of the Millennium Bulk coal terminal proposed in Longview, Washington, using the same broad approach as has been proposed by the state of Washington for the Gateway Pacific coal terminal north of Bellingham. The environmental review should include an analysis of all impacts, mitigation options and costs, including all those impacts directly or indirectly affecting King County and local jurisdictions within King County.

E. The council affirms its support for stronger federal standards to protect public health and the environment by limiting the amount of greenhouse gas pollution.

F. The council urges state and federal agencies to conduct a full environmental review of all proposed coal terminals in Washington and Oregon using the same broad approach as has been proposed by the state of Washington for the Gateway Pacific coal terminal north of Bellingham. The environmental review of all proposed coal terminals should include an analysis of all impacts, mitigation options and costs, including all those impacts directly or indirectly affecting King County and local jurisdictions within King County.

G. The council hereby expresses its intent to include in its federal legislative agenda a request to the United States Department of the Interior to examine new and expanded coal leases in the Powder River basin including a review of federal coal leasing practices including an analysis of appropriate pricing for coal leases and a comprehensive review of the greenhouse gas and other air quality effects of continued and expanded coal leasing.