

# CRUDE OIL TRAINS PROPOSED FOR GRAYS HARBOR



For many people in Grays Harbor County in Washington State, the coal train issue was clear. A coal train terminal at the Port of Grays Harbor was obviously wrong. The coal dust could not be controlled to prevent contamination of oyster beds and a priceless pearl of the Pacific Flyway—the Grays Harbor National Wildlife refuge. The proposals for a coal train terminal at the Port of Grays Harbor are not moving forward. The coal the federal government has released from the Powder River Basin continues to search for a way to Asia, but it will not flow through the Port of Grays Harbor.

But now the oil that the federal government has released from the Bakken formation in the northern Midwest is also searching for a route to Asia.

The people in Grays Harbor face three new proposals for crude oil train terminals, complete with tanks, long heavy trains, and the risk of huge oil spills in local streams and rivers, near the oyster beds, and adjacent to the wildlife refuge.

At a community meeting on February 13, 2013, R. D. Grunbaum and Arnie Martin of Citizens for a Clean Harbor presented a long and detailed explanation of the proposals and the potential problems they would bring:

- The Westway Terminals project would add four tanks, with a total capacity of 33,600,000 gallons of crude oil. One unit train of 120 tank cars would arrive every three days.
- The US Development proposal would include a group of tanks with a total capacity of 42,000,000 gallons of crude oil. Train frequency is undetermined. Possibly one unit train would arrive per day.
- An existing biofuel plant, Imperium, would add as many as nine crude oil tanks in two phases, for a total capacity of 30,240,000 gallons of crude oil. About one unit train may arrive per day when fully built out.

The oil would be transferred from the tanks to oil tankers for shipment to California and Port Angeles. Although it is not legal to export American crude oil, it is likely that the oil will find a way to fill increasing demand in Asia.

After the community meeting there was a question and answer period. People asked, what if there is an earthquake? Aren't the proposed tanks in the tsunami zone? The tracks cross many rivers and streams. What about a spill on the tracks? Isn't a spill inevitable given enough time? Why would we want to take that risk? The trains are a mile and a half long, won't they block traffic and emergency services? Won't burning this fossil fuel add to global warming? Shouldn't we be moving away from fossil fuels to renewables?

For these projects, the Department of Ecology and the city of Hoquiam share lead responsibilities under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). At the meeting representatives of Ecology and the city of Hoquiam explained SEPA, the meaning of industrial zoning, and the permitting process for such a proposal. A concerned citizen asked why we would allow such projects to be built if they are not in the best interest of the community? Doesn't the community have the right to reject proposals that bring risks of toxic spills, and threats to water quality and wildlife, since if these things happen they will affect us? The city of Hoquiam representative pointed out allowed uses for the industrial zone. The implication made was that the community has already accepted these conditions. The Department of Ecology representative pointed out that there are oil tanks and terminals on the water in other places in our State. We were told that because it is regulated, it is allowed.

A farmer said that because of Department of Ecology regulations, he cannot cut a tree down within 200 feet of the river on his farm. He asked, isn't transporting oil much more of a threat to the river than cutting down a tree? If the river and estuary are protected from the removal of trees on farms, how can this much oil be allowed right on the water? The local people asking these questions appeared to be frustrated at the focus on process and paperwork, and the disregard for the scale of the disaster that a spill would bring. Our current laws and permitting system are blinded by fossil fuels, accepting the disproportionate risks associated with transporting and burning them, and subjugating the rights of local communities to the rights of corporations pursuing business opportunities.

There is another, bigger threat hidden in these coal train and oil train proposals—the threat of an economic system that commits us to more and more fossil fuel infrastructure and the growing markets for our coal, oil and gas in developing countries. The World Energy Outlook report of the International Energy Agency said in 2011 and again in 2012 that to have a good chance of avoiding catastrophic global warming, we have only a few years to begin the transition away from fossil fuels. It warned that each new investment in fossil fuel infrastructure such as pipelines and terminals commits us to many years of greenhouse gas emissions, and that there is very little room left in the atmosphere for any more.

Unfortunately, this analysis is based on optimistic International Panel on Climate Change conclusions that neglect dynamic processes such as melting ice caps and methane release from permafrost.

Our current laws, permitting processes, and economic system are throwing us headlong into a future drenched in fossil fuels. Like the local environmental risks brought by the coal trains and oil trains, the problems created by greenhouse gas emissions are effectively disregarded by the current SEPA, zoning and permitting processes. These legal processes are broken. They are not protecting the local environment, the physical limits of the atmosphere and climate, or the people who will be impacted by these projects. The current government and legal system are presiding over the unthinkable. The burning of fossil fuels is destabilizing the climate, compromising earth's life support systems, and causing species extinction and loss of biodiversity that has evolved over millions of years. Ultimately, the loss of agricultural regions, drought, floods, climate refugees, and resulting political destabilization may threaten civilization itself, creating conditions which, as former Tyndall Centre director Kevin Anderson says, are "incompatible with an organized global community." No legal process that permits destruction of ecosystem services that human life depends upon is legitimate.

The coal train issue was so clear, so easy to define. A coal train terminal at the Port of Grays Harbor was so obviously wrong.

The insidious hidden danger in these oil train terminal proposals—the threat of an economic system committing us to more and more fossil fuel infrastructure—is harder to define, more difficult to explain, and harder to fight. At the heart of this fossil fuel infrastructure decision is something new—an unprecedented intergenerational rights issue. For the first time in history, one generation will determine what kind of earth the generations that follow will live in. If we are human and moral and courageous, we will stop building fossil fuel infrastructure now, and begin the transition to renewables. At stake are the rights of our grandchildren to civilization and an undiminished earth.

Source: <http://readthedirt.org/crude-oil-trains-proposed-for-grays-harbor-wa-citizens-challenge-permitting-process>