

# HEAVY TRAFFIC STILL AHEAD

In the past 18 months since publication of *Heavy Traffic Ahead* (HTA) WORC's study on the rail impacts from proposed coal export facilities in the Pacific Northwest (PNW), coal export plans have been changed, revised, delayed, moved forward and/or solidified and new proposals and plans have been announced and put forward.

*Heavy Traffic Still Ahead* incorporates those changes and updates the earlier report's modeling of how large volumes of coal would travel across over 4,000 miles of railroad through dozens of communities, between coal mines primarily located in the Powder River Basin (PRB) and ports (existing and proposed) in the Pacific Northwest in Washington State, Oregon, and British Columbia.

The report models four scenarios based on announced coal export plans:

- 74 million tons per year (2018)
- 99 million tons per year (2018)
- 128 million tons per year (2023)
- 170 million tons per year (2023)

Download the full report at  
[www.heavytrafficahead.org](http://www.heavytrafficahead.org)

The report is not a crystal ball and does not offer an opinion on whether ports will be built, or coal contracts signed. What it does tell citizens, policy makers, other shippers, local governments, and state and federal decision-makers is what to anticipate if the announced or published plans come to fruition.

## KEY FINDINGS:

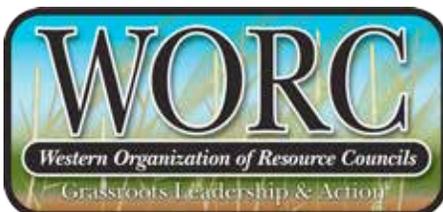
- Although there have been significant changes in PNW export terminal plans since July 2012 when HTA was published, potential PRB to PNW export coal volumes remain enormous.
- The number of PRB to PNW loaded and empty export coal trains per day could be as high as 27 to 36 trains per day in five years, and could reach between 47 to 63 trains per day in 10 years, if current coal export proposals come to fruition.
- A major bottleneck is Burlington Northern Santa Fe's (BNSF) 70.5-mile line between Sandpoint, ID, and Spokane, WA, which already has serious capacity issues and would feel the full potential impact of added BNSF PRB to PNW export coal trains. In 5 years, 26 to 35 coal trains per day could be added to this line and this level could increase to 45 to 60 coal trains per day in a decade. In addition, this line could see 22 trains per day of loaded and empty Bakken oil trains moving to the PNW. As a result, rail traffic over this important bottleneck could easily double and exceed its current capacity of approximately 70 trains per day.
- The 24.8 mile stretch between Huntley, MT, and Mossmain, MT (which traverses Montana's largest city, Billings) also represents a major bottleneck. Currently, this line handles approximately 18 to 22 trains per day. Total rail traffic through Billings could more than triple in a decade.

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- Compounding the issues of traffic and congestion that would be caused by increased coal shipments on the region’s rail system, potential BNSF railroad movements of Bakken oil from North Dakota to PNW destinations would add up to 22 trains daily.
- The voluminous and very profitable PRB to PNW export coal traffic and profitable Bakken oil traffic to the PNW would consume most of the existing rail capacity, which would displace traffic and result in higher freight rates for other rail shippers.
- A variety of railroad freight shippers would likely be adversely impacted by tightened rail capacity if the export coal terminals are built. Intermodal container traffic and export grain traffic could experience higher freight rates, deteriorating service and higher equipment costs.
- Passenger and commuter rail traffic, including Amtrak’s Empire Builder, which travels through the highly congested “Funnel” between Sandpoint and Spokane, would likely be disrupted by increased rail congestion caused by an increase in export coal trains.

One of the challenges to communities dealing with these potential large increases in rail volume is the lack of timely, reliable information, due in part to the lack of transparency by Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, which controls most of the routes between the Powder River Basin and the Pacific Northwest. BNSF failed to respond to requests for information from the report’s authors. In the appendix are response letters from Union Pacific Railroad and Montana Rail Link, both of which responded to request for more detailed information on the questions addressed in the report.

Local community infrastructure expenditures that could be triggered by large increases in rail traffic would cost taxpayers hundreds of millions, if not billions. Some (by no means all) of the identified potential mitigation costs include:

- Sheridan, WY: \$156 - \$169 million
- Billings , MT: \$18 - \$150 million
- Livingston, MT: \$8.7 million
- Helena, MT: \$13 million
- Spokane, WA: \$71.6 million
- Seattle, WA: \$100 million
- Edmonds, WA: \$80 million
- Marysville, WA: \$92 million
- Mt. Vernon, WA: \$40 million
- Burlington, WA: \$40 million

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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