

The Westway Crude Oil Export Terminal proposed for Hoquiam, WA

The glut of oil produced by fracking in North Dakota persuaded oil and rail companies to develop plans to export crude oil to Asia. Two proposals to build crude export terminals in Grays Harbor were made in February of 2013. In April, the City of Hoquiam issued construction permits, finding that the projects posed no significant environmental threat to the estuary or the coast. Local groups, including Grays Harbor Audubon, appealed the ruling to the Shorelines Hearing Board, which ruled in November of 2013 that the proposals would need a full environmental review. A third oil port was proposed the following year, and was also required to undergo environmental impact analysis.

During this review, two of the three projects were abandoned, due to local opposition, and falling oil prices. The final Environmental Impact Statement for Westway, the remaining port, is due September 30th. Westway intends to process as many as 49,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Permits could be issued by the City of Hoquiam in early October.

Trains: Crude oil would be brought by 80 to 120-car trains from the prairie states, down the Columbia, up to Centralia, where they would follow a 59-mile spur line along the Chehalis River, crossing more than 30 river bridges before reaching Hoquiam. Westway crude oil would be carried on 4 to 5 trains per week.

Crude oil trains have had an alarming number of derailings, fires, and explosions in recent years. 47 people were killed when the town of Lac Megantic was destroyed in an oil train explosion in 2013. A derailment and fire in the town of Mosier, Oregon last June dumped 42,000 gallons of Bakken crude oil, into both the Columbia River, and into the town's wastewater system. From Centralia, Westway's oil trains would follow a hundred-year-old line, one which has had multiple derailings in recent years, down the Chehalis River, and through the heart of downtown Aberdeen and parts of Hoquiam. A spill along the river would end up in the downstream estuary, and an explosion in Aberdeen could destroy parts of the downtown area.

Shipping: Westway estimates it would export the crude oil in 119 to 238 barges and tankers every year. The vessels would follow a narrow and shallow channel, across the estuary, out the hazardous mouth of Grays Harbor, and along the coastline. In 1988, the barge Nestucca spilled 231,000 gallons of oil off the mouth Grays Harbor, killing some 56,000 seabirds, and polluting beaches from Oregon to the Straits of Juan De Fuca.

Worse yet, if a spill occurred **inside** the estuary, the impact would last for decades. Grays Harbor has a huge number of mudflats, productive for both shellfish farmers and fishermen, and for wildlife. A spill would sterilize much of this area, and mitigation measures would be completely ineffective.

Economy: A 2013 University of Washington study identified that 30% of the Grays Harbor workforce depends on a healthy estuary and coast. Increased traffic and pollution would threaten those jobs, while an oil spill would destroy many of them. In order to provide fewer than 100 permanent jobs, the Westway project would jeopardize a third of the **existing** jobs in the area. A 2015 survey found that tourists and recreational users spend some \$481 million per year on Washington's coast, roughly a third of it in Grays Harbor areas. This revenue, and the jobs it supports, is jeopardized by the Westway project.

Earthquakes: The Westway terminal is situated on unstable estuary sediments, and any structures built on them would likely collapse in a large earthquake, which geologists predict has a one-in-three chance of occurring in the next 50 years. Westway intends to store as much as 55 million gallons of oil and chemicals on site. A large earthquake, or associated tsunami could easily release that oil into surrounding waters.

Citizens speak: 90,000 people submitted comments concerning the proposed oil ports. The City Council of Aberdeen passed a 2014 resolution opposing Westway, which provide huge risks, but no benefits for the City. In 2015 the Hoquiam City Council expressed its concerns with a revision to its zoning laws.

Integrity: Westway's San Pedro, California facility sustained ten serious safety violations resulting in federal fines. The City of Los Angeles spent millions to buy out the company's lease in 2007, and still had to spend \$30 million to clean up the mess Westway left behind when they bailed out. A Westway facility in Illinois leaked 50,000 pound of acid, failed to report it, and was sanctioned by the EPA. The company has incurred five additional fines since 2010 for safety and maintenance failures on rail lines it was responsible for.

It's no coincidence that the daily capacity projected by Westway is 49,000 barrels, since a 50,000-barrel total would trigger a more intensive review process. Internal documents demonstrate they have played with their numbers in order to avoid state regulations and public review. They have referred to the project as the "Grays Harbor Cash Cow"

Credit-rating agencies have downgraded Westway in each of the past two years. The company carries a substantial debt, and it has now achieved junk bond ratings. Westway's financial standing does not suggest it has the capacity to provide the kind of design, and operational and infrastructure maintenance that could protect the communities of Grays Harbor from the incredibly risky project they proposed. All risk, little gain.

Birds: A half a million migratory birds rely on healthy mudflats in Grays Harbor for resting and feeding during their spring and fall migrations. If Westway is approved, incidental pollution will jeopardize the inter-tidal zone. If a large spill occurs, many of the shorebird populations will be decimated, if not become extinct. After flights of several thousand miles, birds arriving at sterile mudflats covered with oil will surely die.

Ask Hoquiam city officials to deny Westway's construction permits.

Mayor Jasmine Dickhoff: mayor@cityofhoquiam.com

City Administrator Brian Shay: bshay@cityofhoquiam.com

Ben Winkleman, City Council: bwinkelman@cityofhoquiam.com

-if anyone wants to use snail mail: City of Hoquiam, 609 8th St, Hoquiam, WA 98550

Be sure to cc: **Westport** Mayor Rob Bearden, at: mayorbearden@ci.westport.wa.us

Ocean Shores Mayor Crystal Dingler, at: cdingler@osgov.com

Aberdeen Mayor Erik Larson, at: mayor@aberdeenwa.gov

Much of this information is derived from a report by the Sightline Institute (which is a terrific local resource for a variety of issues if you've never used it):

http://www.sightline.org/research_item/the-facts-about-westway/