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September 16, 2013

ENVS 101

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EIS Comments

Noise pollution is any undesirable or bothersome sound in the environment. This can bother our daily lives by disturbing sleep, conversation and overall lowering the quality of one's life. If there is going to be an increase in train traffic throughout the northwest because of a coal export there will also be an increase in noise pollution. Noise pollution can be just as harmful as many other pollutants in our environment. It is easy to be prevalent in our environment because most people do not realize that it is a pollutant because it is not a visible pollutant or a pollutant that can easily be taken control of. Noise is measured in a unit called decibels or more commonly seen as "db." To put this scale into perspective, the American Academy of Audiology notes that normal conversation is usually measured around 60 decibels and this is considered to be of moderate volume. Alarms clocks are close to 80 decibels (loud), jets are 120 decibels (very loud), and gunshots are in the range of 140 decibels (painful and dangerous for long durations). A train, which is required by federal law to blow its horn for 15-20 seconds at any public crossing, gives off a sound measuring at least 96 decibels.¹ This is 16 times the loudness of a morning alarm clock. Imagine adding much more of this type of pollution into our already noise polluted world if a coal export were put in the northwest.

¹American Academy of Audiology. Copyright 2009. Web. 11 Nov. 2013

Noise barriers, also known as sound walls, are used as a way to displace noise. These are usually used for the purpose of large highways but are now being used on railroads. Noise barriers tend to be fairly effective. They are designed to reduce five decibels of noise for residence located directly behind the wall and cut perceived noise in half. Beyond that, they are designed to reduce the sound by 10 decibel. Although this gets rid of the issue of noise that the trains are causing, sound walls cost a large amount of money. On average, they cost \$53 per square foot.² This means that a 14-foot high wall would cost about 3.9 million dollars per mile. Cost might also increase in urban settings if infrastructures (like water pipes, retaining walls, etc.) need to be moved. This money would not be taken from the train company but rather the state of Washington. The cost to get rid of excess noise will come out of the taxpayer's pockets.

Trains, as pointed out above, are very loud. Their metal wheels constantly rubbing against the metal tracks creates a lot of noise in addition to their horns and the equipment used to warn the public of their whereabouts. If trains pass by schools or work areas (which they will), this will lead to distractions and therefore lead to lower performances in school and work. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), noise pollution has the ability to affect the health of many people as one's health can take a toll in the areas related to stress, high blood pressure, speech interference, hearing loss, sleep disruption, and lost productivity. The EPA notes that the most concerning health risk from noise pollution is Noise Induced hearing loss (NIHL). Overall, noise pollution has harmful consequences to a society's overall health, and should be considered in the

² Sexton, Tim. "WSDOT - Noise FAQ." *WSDOT - Noise FAQ*. WSDOT, 2013. Web. 09 Nov. 2013.

increase of coal trains. In addition to this, property values will drop because of increased noise levels. When people look to buy land and hear loud noises of random coal trains passing, these people will not want to buy whatever property they are looking to purchase. The additional noises described above pose negative consequences to our society and therefore are not wanted. Running a greater amount of trains through the northwest will only cause distraction, annoy residents and lower property values.