

Crude Oil Terminal, Oil Trains Threaten Columbia River Communities

After signaling its disinterest in exporting dirty coal overseas, the Port of Vancouver is poised to take on the shipment of another dirty fossil fuel – crude oil.

The Proposal

The Port is considering a proposal by Tesoro/Savage to ship up to a **staggering 360,000 barrels of crude oil each day along the Columbia River**. That's more oil than Canada's TransMountain Pipeline—the pipeline that carries crude to West Coast refineries—transports in a day. The proposed oil terminal would require **at least four, mile-and-a-half long unit trains per day**. The companies need the Port of Vancouver's Board of Commissioners—a publicly elected body— to approve a lease, the first step toward building a crude oil terminal.

If granted, Tesoro/Savage's proposal would represent a massive commitment by the Port of Vancouver to dirty fossil fuels.

Currently, the Port of Vancouver is a leading shipper of [wind](#)

turbine components and other cargoes, but Tesoro/Savage seek to transform the Port into one of the West Coast's largest oil ports.



*Oil unit train pulling into Anacortes, WA, refinery.
Photo by Paul K. Anderson*

Why Crude Oil is a Bad Deal for Columbia River Communities and Beyond

Before agreeing to any leases or options with Tesoro/Savage, the Port of Vancouver should consider potential environmental, economic and public safety concerns:

- **The Public Deserves Better.** The public deserves the opportunity to learn about the project and give input before any decisions are made regarding leases or options for the proposed oil terminal. The Port and the City of Vancouver should engage with impacted businesses, neighborhoods and community members prior to reaching any agreement for a lease or lease option with the Tesoro/Savage.
- **Oil Spill Risk Skyrockets.** The terminal would increase rail traffic and oil spill risks through the Columbia River Gorge and the City of Vancouver. Oil spills have the potential to cause dramatic harm to fish habitat and nearby neighborhoods and businesses along the proposed rail route. According to a recent study by the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, rail accidents occur 34 times more frequently than pipeline accidents for every ton of crude or other hazardous material shipped comparable distances. While the Association of American Railroads claims the study was flawed, the association acknowledges the likelihood of a rail accident is double or triple the chance of a pipeline problem.¹

- **The Heavy Toll of Rail Traffic.** The terminal would require at least four full unit trains and four empty unit trains of oil each day to ship 360,000 barrels of oil on a daily basis. According to Tesoro/Savage, trains would be comprised of 120 cars or more and would extend 7661 feet in length (*almost a mile and a half*). These long, heavy trains would exacerbate traffic delays in communities along the rail lines in Washington, such as Washougal, Spokane, and Vancouver. The eight oil unit trains could come in addition to proposed coal unit trains – over a dozen of them – destined for Longview and Bellingham.
- **Impacts Near & Far.** The proposed oil terminal is initially intended to ship shale oil from the Bakken formation in North Dakota and Montana to West Coast refineries. Oil companies extract Bakken oil through the process of hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”), a notoriously dirty method of producing fossil fuels that has polluted aquifers and damaged agricultural lands. In 2011 the oil and gas industry reported over 1,000 spills of wastewater, drilling fluids, or other materials in North Dakota, alone.ⁱⁱ
- **Paving the Way for Tar Sands Export.** In the future, the proposed oil terminal could be used to ship Canadian tar sands oil to overseas markets, much like the controversial Keystone XL pipeline. Tar sands oil is one of the dirtiest fossil fuels on the planet.
- **Dirty Energy or Clean Energy Future?** The proposed oil terminal will increase access to and consumption of dirty oil. At 360,000 barrels of oil per day, the terminal will ship over 131 million barrels of crude oil per year. The combustion of this oil, alone (not counting the energy cost of producing the oil) will release over 56 million metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, *as much as almost 12 million cars worth of greenhouse gas pollution.*ⁱⁱⁱ The community of Vancouver can do better than becoming a trafficker of dirty fossil fuels.
- **Too Many Unanswered Questions.** How will the City of Vancouver and the Port of Vancouver evaluate the safety and potential spill risks involved with the massive oil terminal? Having spent enormous time, money, and effort in cleaning up Alcoa’s old aluminum site, does it really make sense to commit the area to another dirty industry?

We need the Port of Vancouver to consider all of the implications of Tesoro/Savage’s proposed oil terminal. Contact the Port of Vancouver Commission to share your opposition or concern, ask questions, or simply learn more about the project.

Email: povcommissioners@portvanusa.com.

Phone: 360-693-3611

Mail: POV Board of Commissioners, 3103 N.W. Lower River Rd., Vancouver, WA 98660

With questions for Riverkeeper about proposed oil exports, contact Dan Serres at

Dan@Columbiariverkeeper.org or (503) 890-2441

ⁱ http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/index.ssf/2012/12/trains_carrying_more_oil_acros.html.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.propublica.org/article/the-other-fracking-north-dakotas-oil-boom-brings-damage-along-with-prosperity>

ⁱⁱⁱ 360,000/day x 365 days = 131,400,000 barrels/year.

131,400,000 barrels per year x 0.43 metric tons of CO₂/barrel = 56,502,000 metric tons of CO₂ per year

56,502,000 metric tons of CO₂ per year x 1 car/4.8 metric tons of CO₂ per year = 11,771,250 cars per year

Conversions from U.S. EPA website, <http://www.epa.gov/greenpower/pubs/calcmeth.htm#vehicles>