Puget Sound Regional Council wrong on Gateway Terminal

Today, the Puget Sound Regional Council released a study evaluating the projected impact of the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal on regional infrastructure. While the study acknowledges the significant economic benefits of the Gateway Pacific Terminal, its overall conclusions are simply not supported by the facts.

The greatly exaggerated "costs" projected in the study just don't add up. From wait times at crossings, to impacts on other industries, to the economic impacts of the project, the PSRC is wrong.

Here's what you need to know:

On train traffic: The volume of trains running in Washington is lower today than prior to the recession when rail volume reached its peak. While the Gateway Pacific terminal proposal will add nine loaded trains a day in King County by 2025, that volume is manageable when compared to the 60 or more trains that move through the area today. More important, it's comparable to past rail volumes that communities experienced without issue as recently as 2006.

On rail capacity: The study suggests that Gateway could impact rail capacity and the value of railways to other industries. And yet, the Washington Farm Bureau's own independent research concluded
the Gateway Pacific Terminal will benefit Washington's agricultural shippers by lowering costs and expanding market opportunities. As the PSRC notes, agriculture is the largest user of rail today. The overwhelming support for Gateway from Washington's agriculture community underscores the regional economic benefits of the terminal.

Extent of economic benefits: The PSRC's claim that Gateway will primarily benefit Whatcom County doesn't tell the whole story. Gateway, in conjunction with two additional proposed bulk-commodity terminals serving coal, will provide $1.5 billion in new investment in trade capacity in our region that will benefit all trade industries. As one of the largest private-investment proposals in the region, the regional benefits of Gateway Pacific have been praised by the Washington State Farm Bureau, Association of Washington Business, and Washington State Labor Council, because of the substantial benefits to the statewide economy.

Study authors funded by opponents: One of the main study authors, PFM, has completed past work for Communitywise Bellingham, an advocacy organization opposed to the Gateway Pacific Project. This conflict of interests is not noted in the study.

The bottom line: Growth in our railroads and ports is not an economic cost. As the most trade dependent state in the nation, with 40% of all jobs in Washington tied to trade, growth is a sign of economic recovery and an opportunity to continue to expand our success as America's Gateway to Asia.

The broad labor, business, community, and agriculture members that support these projects through Alliance for Northwest Jobs and Exports membership speaks to the regional importance of Gateway and similar facilities.
Several area leaders responded to the study, in support of the Gateway Terminal today:

"The point is that dislike of a specific commodity or opposition to its transport should not be allowed to constrain or otherwise damage a rail transportation system critical to the Washington economy and its trade position. Many of the opponents of coal would not be stoking fears of rail congestion were almost any other commodity in play. In fact, many would be supporting increases in train traffic to rid our highways and cities of major congestion and air deterioration caused by car and trucks."

- Terry Finn, member of the Puget Sound Regional Council's Transportation Policy Board

"If our trade-dependent economy is going to generate more family wage jobs and if we're going to keep the jobs we have now, our state and the railroads need to invest in critical rail improvements."

- Commissioner Bill Bryant, representing Washington's ports on the Puget Sound Regional Council executive board.