



SOUND CITIES ASSOCIATION

36 Cities. A Million People. One Voice.

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Sound Cities Association unanimously approves policy to have Federal and Washington State governments address risks of shipping oil via rail through region

In order to address the dramatic increase in the amount of oil being transported through the region by rail and vessel transport, and the potential impacts on public safety and economic disruption from a possible crude oil spill incident, the Sound Cities Association (SCA) today asked the Federal Government to implement safety regulations regarding oil transport via rail and urged the Washington State Legislature to adopt legislation promoting rail safety. SCA represents 36 cities in King County, Washington, and provides a regional voice for nearly one million people.

“By some estimates, the volume of petroleum and petroleum products moving by rail through Oregon and Washington will increase to 800,000 barrels per day,” said Auburn Mayor Nancy Backus. “We need to take steps immediately to address the risks and be prepared to respond to an oil train accident.”

According to estimates by Sightline, a non-profit research center focused on issues of sustainability, each week there are currently on average about 11.9 loaded oil trains, each carrying about 100 cars, traveling through King County. If the refinery expansion plans are approved in Anacortes and Ferndale, that estimate increases to on average about 21.7 loaded oil trains traveling through King County each week.

In the policy statement, SCA also urged rail companies to share the following information with local communities so they may be fully informed and plan for the risks posed by the transport of oil by rail: types of petroleum being transported; transportation routes; the frequency and duration of transfers of petroleum; and, efforts and actions to ensure the safe transport of such commodities.

“Emergency response agencies in the dozens of communities along the rail routes to the state’s oil refineries, as well as communities on routes to proposed export handling facilities, need the information about the shipments to better plan for spills or accidents that may occur in their jurisdictions,” said Kent City Council Member Dennis Higgins.

BNSF has declined to provide estimates of crude oil train traffic specifically for King County, citing federal statutes allowing for the non-disclosure of the information.

SCA also acknowledged there are measures in place to promote the safety of marine transportation and protect state waters from oil spills, but urges the Federal Government and Washington State Legislature to review those measures due to the increased movement of crude oil. Finally, SCA urged the King County Office of Emergency Management to review and update the county's incident response plans to address the risk from increased transport of petroleum by rail

“It is important that we are ready to respond to any disaster that may threaten lives, our environment, or cause major disruption to our regional economy,” said King County Councilmember Rod Dembowski, who was the author of a similar unanimously adopted motion yesterday by the King County Council. “King County is home to the spine of our regional rail infrastructure, which is critically important to our shipping and manufacturing sectors.”

Washington is experiencing a dramatic increase in the amount of oil moving through the state as well as an unprecedented change in the way oil is transported. Crude oil shipments arriving by tanker to Washington refineries is declining and is being replaced by crude oil shipments by rail from the Bakken formation in North Dakota.

The U.S. Department of Transportation Pipeline and Hazardous Materials and Safety Administration has determined that crude oil from the Bakken formation is prone to ignite at a lower temperature compared to oil from elsewhere presenting a serious public safety concern. Recent derailments, spills, and fires such as the derailment in Lac-Megantic, Quebec, and Lynchburg, Virginia, illustrate the potential impacts to public safety and economic disruption that could result from the transport of petroleum by rail.

SCA, which was formerly known as the Suburban Cities Association, was established more than 40 years ago to help King County cities act locally and partner regionally to create vital and thriving communities through advocacy, education, leadership, mutual support and networking.

For more information, please visit www.SoundCities.org.

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