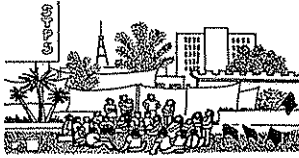


Delphine Smith
09-85



Project 12898: Solutions for West County Land Use and Environmental Justice

September 21, 2009

California Air Resources Board
1001 I Street, Sacramento CA 95818

Honorable Board Members:

As members of Project 12898: Solutions for West County Land Use & Environmental Justice, including community residents of neighborhoods that face high levels of air pollution from trains and rail yards, we are writing to strongly **urge you to take the most aggressive measures in your power to ensure that diesel pollution from locomotive and rail yard activities is reduced quickly.** Project 12898 is a CalTrans-funded partnership between community-based organizations, a research institute, and a county health services agency. Contra Costa Health Services, a Project 12898 partner, has already sent a letter to you under separate cover concerning CARB's rail yard rule. The goal of Project 12898 is to increase the capacity of residents in West Contra Costa County to engage in transportation and land use planning decisions and develop community solutions to the impacts of freight transport in their neighborhoods. From 2007 to 2009, Project 12898 advanced this goal through a number of activities, including convening a series of well-attended community workshops on proposed expansions of freight transport infrastructure in West County as well as related transportation investment and land use decisions.

Over the past several years the California Air Resources Board has completed Health Risk Assessments (HRAs) for 18 rail yards in the state of California. The HRAs have demonstrated that these 18 rail yards pose an unacceptable level of diesel exposure to California residents. West Contra Costa County hosts one of these rail yards, the BNSF rail yard, which is adjacent to two neighborhoods with high residential densities, one of which is entirely surrounded by railroad tracks (Iron Triangle). According to CARB's 2007 Health Risk Assessment for the BNSF rail yard, approximately 76,000 people live within a 3-mile radius of the BNSF rail yard facility, which releases 5 tons of diesel particular matter emissions per year. CARB's HRA also found that, in 2005, there were 10,752 recorded locomotives arriving, departing or passing through this rail yard. This translates into approximately 29 freight trains a day that compound traffic congestion, air and noise pollution, pedestrian safety, and emergency response concerns for area residents.

In 2008, Project 12898 hosted several workshop on freight transport in West County where residents discussed their specific concerns with rail-related land uses in their neighborhoods. Residents expressed the following concerns about how freight train and rail yard operations affect community health and quality of life in West County:

- Train operations, especially idling, aggravate health problems like asthma and respiratory illness by increasing diesel pollution in the area
- Poorly designed or maintained railroad crossings create safety hazards for pedestrians and drivers
- Long freight trains hold up traffic at key intersections at critical times, such as the early morning rush hour, contributing to tardiness at school and on the job
- Train traffic makes neighborhoods less walkable and bikeable for schoolchildren
- Train horns disrupt sleep as well as concentration for children attending local schools
- Trains with tanker cars carrying or storing hazardous materials on tracks near residential neighborhoods increase the likelihood of chemical disasters in neighborhoods that already host more than their fair share of industrial land uses
- Traffic congestion caused by trains passing slows emergency response by blocking ambulances, fire trucks, and other emergency vehicles

In addition, residents participating in Project 12898 workshops identified a number of community solutions that they wanted to see instituted in order to reduce the impacts of rail yards and other rail-related land uses on community health and quality of life. These include:

- Retrofit train engines and rail yard equipment to minimize diesel pollution
- Create grade separations at key locations with a history of rail crossing-related accidents or deaths
- Require fencing, shrubbery, and other physical buffers to separate rail lines and rail yard facilities from residential areas
- Amend train schedules to avoid peak hours and be more predictable, and notify residents of train schedules to minimize delays at intersections
- Place limits on the length of allowable freight trains, particularly those passing at peak hours, in order to reduce traffic congestion at intersections
- Institute quiet zones to minimize train horn noise in residential areas
- Take measures to prevent tanker cars storing hazardous materials from being parked on rail lines adjacent to residential areas
- Involve community residents from directly impacted neighborhoods in identifying additional site-specific measures to reduce the risks that rail-related land uses pose to community health and quality of life

We urge you to take timely action to reduce the health risks posed by rail yards to California's communities. Thank you for your attention and consideration of concerns and solutions raised by residents of rail-impacted neighborhoods in West Contra Costa County.

Sincerely,

Dr. Henry Clark, West County Toxics Coalition

Catalina Garzón and Swati Prakash, Pacific Institute

Coire Reilly, West County Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Collaborative,
Neighborhood House of North Richmond

Delphine Smith, Richmond resident and Member, Contra Costa Asthma Coalition