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Plaquemines coal terminal, more trains pose health and safety risk to West Bank, residents say

coal.jpg

About 25 people attended a meeting Tuesday in Gretna to discuss the impact a proposed coal export facility in Plaquemines Parish would have on train traffic, health and safety on West Bank residents. (*Andrea Shaw, NOLA.com|The Times-Picayune*)

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Health and safety concerns dominated a meeting in **Gretna** Tuesday night (June 10) designed to inform West Bank residents about the potential for increased rail traffic servicing a proposed coal export terminal in **Plaquemines Parish**. Residents said they are worried about the spread of coal dust rising from uncovered freight cars rumbling past neighborhoods, parks and businesses.

"I'm not as concerned for myself as I am for all our young people. I have grandkids, great-grandkids that this will affect," said Gretna resident Erline Lodriguss.

"We may start off well, long term, we may get sick," said Jacqueline Williams of Gretna.



With RAM Terminal **seeking to build a coal export** facility near Ironton, the number of trains servicing the plant is expected to rise, according to the Clean Gulf Commerce Coalition. The New Orleans & Gulf Coast Railroad has a 32-mile track that runs from Algiers into Plaquemines Parish.

Coal trains are more than a mile long, heavier and would add to noise and traffic congestion, said Devin Martin of the Sierra Club. The trains threaten to slow or block emergency response and "trap" residents in their homes, he said.

Grace Morris of the Gulf Restoration Network said Louisiana already has four coal plants, including two in Plaquemines. Besides pollution, the facilities are a danger to one of the state's largest coastal restoration projects, she said.

"The new RAM Terminal would be connected to rail. It would be another huge mound, another 80-foot pile of coal," Morris said. "Coal trains are uncovered. They release clouds of coal dust and diesel fumes. They can trigger asthma attacks, wheezing and coughing."

About 25 people attended **the meeting sponsored by the coalition** comprised of Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Sierra Club, Gulf Restoration Network and Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper. The group has called for a study on the issue and is seeking a resolution for government bodies opposing the project.

Warren Lawrence and Bryan Ernst, both of Myrtle Grove implored residents to spread the word to fight the coal export facility. The men, who live near a similar facility and sued over its operations, spoke of how coal dust coat their homes, cars and boats.

"Do I want to give up my quality of life for economic impact? Lawrence asked.

Said Ernst, "If we can have any input to try to stop RAM coal and the coal trains, please do so. Once they start, it's going to be too late."

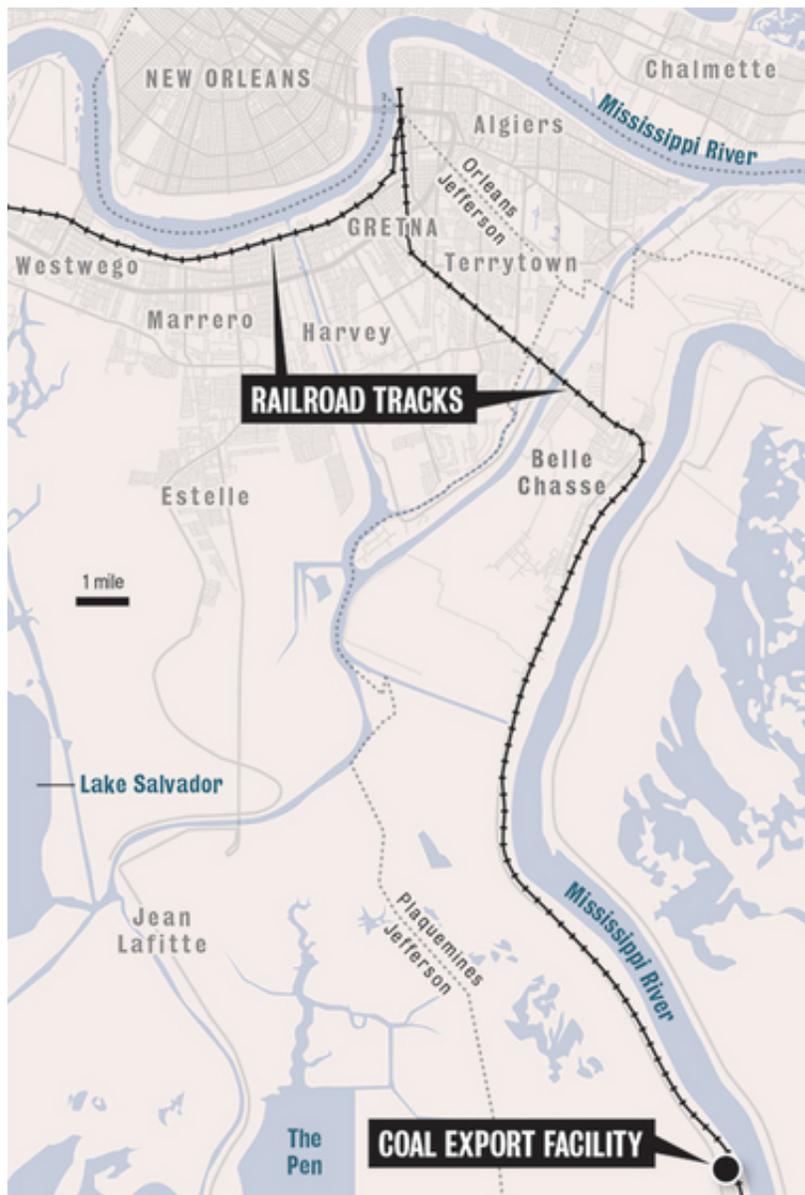
West Bank real estate agent Carolyn Mitchell said she fears that property values will decline with more trains running through neighborhoods, and residents, such as herself, will be frustrated by traffic tie-ups and congestion.

"Right now, Terry Parkway is backed up with just normal traffic," she said. "Sometimes, one little train with 10 cars, I can't get out of my driveway."

Marjorie Kraus, who lives in Gretna blocks from the railroad tracks, said she was surprised by the low turnout Tuesday night. She said most people aren't aware of the proposed coal export facility and the possible consequences it poses for the entire West Bank.

"If they knew how serious this was, you would have had three times the amount of people here," Kraus said.

Lodriguss has lived on Madison Street, which is bisected by the railroad tracks for 56 years. Train traffic



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nearly destroyed the street before the railroad repaired it after years of lobbying, she said. As someone whose quality of life is already impacted by train traffic, the thought of living with coal-carrying trains is daunting, she said.

"We were finally satisfied after years and years of begging for that," she said of the repaved street. "Now this."

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