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## Train traffic, Plaquemines coal export terminal to be focus of Gretna public meeting

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Gretna officials have raised concerns about the amount of train traffic blocking the city's major intersections, delaying emergency response. A meeting Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the Gretna Community Center on Monroe Street will discuss the impact of increased train traffic carrying coal to an export facility in Plaquemines Parish. (NOLA.com | *The Times-Picayune* file photo)

**Andrea Shaw, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune** By **Andrea Shaw, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**  
**Email the author | Follow on Twitter**

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**Gretna** and **Belle Chasse** residents face a greater risk to public safety with an anticipated increase in train traffic servicing a new coal export terminal in **Plaquemines Parish**, according to a coalition of environment activists studying the issue. RAM Terminal has proposed to build a coal export plant on 600 acres **off Louisiana 23 in Myrtle Grove**.

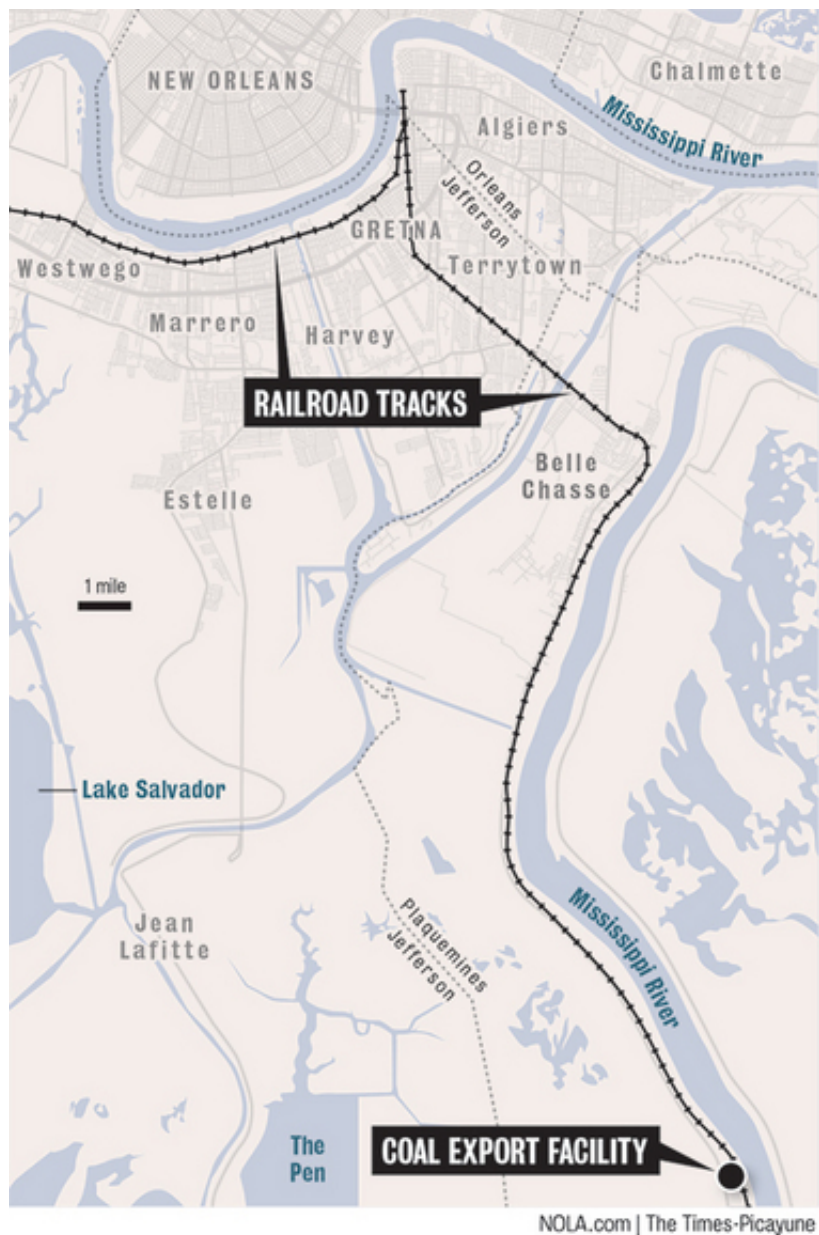
That project would mean more business for the New Orleans & Gulf Coast Railroad, which runs 32 miles from Algiers through downtown Gretna along Louisiana 23, ending at the site of the coal terminal. Uncovered railcars carrying coal through West Bank communities will have a wide-reaching effect, environmental activists say.

"People really don't know about these proposed plans and deserve to have a voice on this issue," said Grace Morris of the Gulf Restoration Network. In an effort to raise awareness the Clean Gulf Commerce Coalition will hold a public meeting Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the Gretna Community Center, 1700 Monroe St.

"Gretna has been making a lot of progress, preserving its historic district, renovating its old post office. It seems Gretna is on the upswing," said Devin Martin, a Sierra Club organizer who lives in Gretna. "The last thing the city needs is to have that rail line turn into an industrial corridor."

City officials have long **complained** about massive freight trains blocking streets and delaying emergency response. In 2006, a house was destroyed and a second badly damaged when a train tied up an intersection for 20 minutes, keeping firefighters from the blaze on Governor Hall Street.

Martin pointed to a 2002 Regional Planning Commission study that examined the railroad in conjunction with plans for the proposed millennium port project in Plaquemines. It found the current rail route to be insufficient for handling a larger volume of traffic. And with one track bisecting the center of Fourth Street in Gretna, "statistically, something will eventually go wrong at the worst possible time," the study said.



The **coal export terminal** is planned for a 600-acre tract off East Ravenna Road near Louisiana 23. Coal would be unloaded from river barges and rail cars, stored and blended on site. The Clean Gulf Commerce Coalition has asked the Regional Planning Commission and state transportation department to look at the environmental, economic and health impacts of increased rail traffic on the West Bank.

"These trains will bisect multiple communities along the route, leading to significant traffic delays and potential safety issues at grade-crossings," wrote Kia Ball, coalition coordinator, in a letter Thursday to the agencies. "The delay of only a few minutes for an emergency response vehicle can mean the difference between life and death for citizens in these rural communities."

The Clean Gulf Commerce Coalition is comprised of the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Sierra Club, Gulf Restoration Network and Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper.

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