

Commission on the Environment
Preliminary Issue Analysis for Mayor and Council
March 2003

Request: Provide recommendation on funding a study this upcoming budget cycle on a review of coal dust and other issues associated with the CSX/Metro rail

Background: Twinbrook Community Association has asked the Mayor and Council to conduct a study this year on the air pollution effects of coal dust coming from rail lines going through their neighborhood.

Situation Analysis: Since the loading of coal does not occur in this area, it is highly unlikely that coal dust is the primary source of air pollution coming from the trains. The more significant air pollution concern likely results from the diesel engines pulling the cars. Other significant environmental impacts may include noise from diesel trains.

We note that:

- Other regions have converted rail lines from diesel to electric to reduce source point pollution and noise effects
- To address air pollution alone, conversion to biodiesel could reduce effects.
- Rail traffic could be moved to the “old Main Line” and the existing CSX line could be used for light rail.
- These options for the most part are beyond the purview of the city and would take state intervention.

Actions:

- Query community to better define neighborhood concerns and issues this fiscal year
- Consider a more comprehensive study of the impact of freight rail through the City generally – exhaust, noise, etc.
- Use Commission Expert Roster to identify individual/s who could help frame parameters for future discussion with community as outreach to clarify their concerns and help frame issues for future review

Information Sources

- See http://www.stb.dot.gov/eis/dme/dme_deis.htm for further information on the environmental impacts of proposed coal trains
- See <http://www.arch21.org/0800part3.html> for information on replacing diesel with electric locomotives.
- See <http://www.pacerfarm.org/railroad.htm> for information on MARC trains through the area
- See http://www.angelfire.com/md3/i-270/I_270_Transportation_Proposal.html for discussion on conversion to the Old Main Line.

Recommendation:

The Commission does not recommend a study of coal dust at this time, but does suggest further dialog with the community to clarify issues.
