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Jefferson Parish Council backs study of West Bank rail routes; residents call it 'empty promise'

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Adriane Quinlan, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune By **Adriane Quinlan, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**
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The **Jefferson Parish Council** on Wednesday endorsed a study of whether to re-route trains that now travel through **Gretna**, pushing them out to **Harvey** instead. Residents, alarmed at the prospect of coal trains rumbling through any neighborhood, told the council re-routing is no solution.

Rather, the opponents called **re-routing** an "empty promise" that would address neither the core issue of trains bearing coal nor a new twist: a new coal export terminal proposed in Plaquemines Parish. It would ship its product through West Jefferson.

"They're completely separate issues," said Grace Morris, a campaign organizer for the Gulf Restoration Network. "People are getting so confused. They're presenting re-routing as a solution to the new coal terminal facility. And it has nothing to do with it."

With no discussion, the council voted unanimously to back the Regional Planning Commission's efforts to secure federal money for a re-routing study. For local match money, the council agreed to halve the \$53,333 cost with the city of Gretna.

But residents spoke against the presence of any trains in West Jefferson, and against the proposed RAM Terminal at Ironton. "It will still take years, if it ever happened," Gretna resident Gayle Bertucci said of re-routing. "In the meantime coal cars traveling through Gretna will impact citizens' property values, their health and their safety.

"Furthermore, moving the tracks will only shift those concerns to another community. I might add this community also is in Jefferson Parish."

"This community" is Nancy Dwyer's. The Harvey resident told the council that re-routing would double the train traffic in her neighborhood. She described how a local kindergarten, which already has train tracks three blocks away, would get a new rail line on its other side.

"I don't want coal trains in Gretna," Dwyer said. "However it's unfair that it's proposed that Harvey would have twice as many trains while Gretna would have none."

Laurie Ledet condemned rerouting as an "empty promise to appease the legitimate concerns of our citizens." She said the proposed study "does nothing to address our immediate concern of RAM Terminals shipping coal by train."

All three residents called on the Parish Council to ask the Army Corps of Engineers to look at the potential effect of the coal terminal. "If Jefferson Parish were to say, 'This has an impact on us. You need to look at this,' that would urge the corps to take a look at this," Morris said. "The Army corps is looking at this as a small project. We're looking at this as a very large project that affects everyone."

"We are looking to you, the Jefferson Parish Council, to lead and protect the entire West Bank," Dwyer said.

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