

REGULAR MEETING - A  
February 11, 2020

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Port of Seattle Commissioners  
Commissioner Felleman  
Commissioner Bowman  
Commissioner Steinbrueck  
Commissioner Calkins  
Commissioner Cho  
Executive Director Metruck  
Maritime Director Stephanie Jones Stebbins  
PO Box 1209 | Seattle, WA 98111

Dear Commissioners, Thank you for taking time to listen and reflect on public comment regarding the cruise expansion project at T46. I have heard one Commissioner express that because nothing has been decided yet, concerned individuals should just wait for the EIS, with a subtle implication being we shouldn't bother to show up at meetings or register public comments until then. I really hope that isn't what I'm hearing from this Commission. I think that the vast majority of individuals who have spoken out against T46 have done so with great respect for the integrity and public service of the Commissioners. As someone with Board experience, I know that it can be uncomfortable when one's plans on how to achieve goals are challenged, but that's the price of democracy, and as we can see on the national stage now, it's a slippery slope when we start discouraging public input and responding impatiently to public scrutiny.



Since our last meeting two weeks ago, the Southern resident killer whale (SRKW) orca named Mega, L-41 was declared "presumed dead". In a letter to the Orca Stakeholder Taskforce, Orca Conservancy President Shari Tarantino points out that while starvation due to collapse of the salmon population is the main cause of orca decline, with the breaching of the Snake River dams the best solution, she also acknowledges the adverse impact of ship noise and toxins.<sup>1</sup> As a side note here, I offer my sincere and deep appreciation to

Commissioner Felleman for his past and present leadership at the Orca Conservancy.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.orcaconservancy.org/oc-makes-comment-on-draft-lsrd-report/>

There are two separate, but inter-related issues here – runaway atmospheric heating due to human caused emissions, and the critically endangered SRKW population. Cruise ships are a factor in both. Ships create noise from their propellers and engines which interfere with orcas' ability to echolocate their prey. Data also suggests that ship traffic and consequent noise also elevates stress, affecting metabolism and the viability of newborn whales. However, not enough studies on this have been done to date, and given the critical survival situation for the SRKW, the precautionary principle dictates that further study is warranted before blindly proceeding with expansion of the cruise industry.<sup>2</sup> Even if cruise ships reduce speed upon being alerted that an orca pod is in the area (a purported solution being discussed by the orca task force), reducing noise by slowing vessel speed only prolongs the duration of that noise, as Dr. Scott Veirs, a UW oceanographer points out.<sup>3</sup> In other words, cruise ship traffic still has an adverse impact. While it may be true that Washington state ferries create more noise in specific locations throughout the year, that does not excuse the significant impact of cruise ship noise.<sup>4</sup> Cruise ships are nonessential leisure vessels and their impact cannot be rationalized away by comparing them to the ferry system or container shipping.

The Port cites the logic that a new terminal is needed in order to meet demand. Recently, on his Facebook page, acknowledging that while he is “not a cruise ship booster”, Commissioner Felleman stated that he is “committed to minimizing their environmental impact” and that “the idea of building another cruise ship terminal came about as a way to afford to rebuild T5 into a ‘big ship ready’ container terminal, a prerequisite to staying in the container business.” In confessing that he is not a fan of cruise ships, and promising to commit himself to minimize the impact, he clearly acknowledges that there are problems with the cruise ship business worth scrutinizing. The wider impacts are much larger than the Port seems willing to acknowledge. Cruise emissions are estimated at 1 million tons of GHG per year<sup>5</sup>). Small scale mitigation efforts such as dockside plug ins, solar panels, eel grass pilot projects, cannot even begin to offset the flight emissions associated with current cruise ship passengers, or ship emissions once leaving port. Public statements about environmental stewardship and commitment are of little value if the full scope of the problem isn't even acknowledged.

The Port is operating under an economic philosophy belonging to a previous era, that the only response to consumer demand is to increase production. There is no ethical justification for promoting an expansion of non-essential travel at this moment in planetary history. The bold and courageous action here would be to stop cruise expansion, not to reflexively meet consumer demand. This would help slow air travel and give a significant boost to the societal commitment to decarbonizing the economy.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2019.00606/full>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kuow.org/stories/electric-ferries-reduce-pollution-benefit-to-orcas-less-clear>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.orcasound.net/2019/05/09/king5-story-orcasound-ship-noise/>

<sup>5</sup> Based on 2019 Port data, analysis available upon request.

Even if none of these reasons, move your conscience, it is worth considering that the fortunes of the cruise business will not continue to expand indefinitely and could suddenly decline markedly for any one of a number of reasons. The coronavirus represents another global health challenge that could substantially change how the public thinks about going on a leisure cruise. With at least two vessels locked down on quarantine, it's obvious that the cruise industry is weathering some extremely negative publicity at present. Let us pray that the current epidemic ends quickly. However, to simply assume that the demand for cruise travel will continue to grow and that the T46 facility addition will result in an automatic increase in passenger revenue is a gamble on many future unknowns.

Instead of building infrastructure for a fossil fuel dependent industry which sends the wrong message to the American public now, why not be climate heroes instead? Why not make Seattle the leader in inspiring a US and global effort to actually meet IPCC 2030 targets? As for alternatives to cruise expansion at T46, there are many. A climate museum could be an extension of the new waterfront park that could include a beach restoration, with a long house built in cooperation with the descendants of the Duwamish who once had a village at that very spot. There are many possibilities if we use our imagination and act boldly. Sincerely,

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Iris Antman

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