

To: Canadian Transportation Agency

Subject: Noise along Burrard Inlet Rail Line in Vancouver

March 18, 2018

The Strathcona Residents Association is filing this complaint on behalf of several residents, regarding noise from train operations on the Burrard Inlet Line (BI Line) in Vancouver, BC. Our complaint package comprises this letter which provides background to the issue, and letters from individual residents that describe how the noise has affected them.

The BI Line is a 1 km track that connects the Port of Vancouver to the False Creek railyard to the south. It is used mostly by CN Rail for freight transport. We are residents of Vancouver's Strathcona neighbourhood, through which the BI Line passes. We support rail transport and recognize its importance to the economy, however we expect it to be done with sensitivity towards local environments and human health.

We are aware that a noise complaint to the CTA was made last year by a group of residents from a section of railway known as the Grandview Cut. The Grandview Cut is also used by CN trains. We are a separate group in a neighbourhood several kilometres away, and none of us participated in the Grandview Cut complaint or dispute resolution process.

History and Neighbourhood Context

Strathcona is Vancouver's oldest residential neighbourhood, with many houses that have been here, co-existing with the BI Line, for over a century. At least 10,000 residents live within a 1km radius of the BI Line. For about a decade prior to 2017, there was very little freight traffic on the BI Line. Usage of the BI Line consisted almost entirely of the West Coast Express commuter train, which makes two trips per week for maintenance. The West Coast Express trains run quietly and during the daytime, and residents have never complained about them.

Around January 2017, CN dramatically increased freight train travel along the BI Line without any consultation with the community and with little notice to the City of Vancouver.¹ CN redirected its shunting operations from tracks located along Burrard Inlet, outside of residential areas, to the BI Line. The BI Line is now CN's primary shunting track for Centerm Port, with at least six freight trains per day and approximately 20,000 linear feet of train running along the BI Line. These shunting operations are ongoing 24/7.

¹ "Dramatic increase in train traffic through East Vancouver". CBC News, Jan 5, 2017
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/dramatic-increase-in-train-traffic-through-east-vancouver-1.3922308>

These service changes apparently result from the dissolution of a joint operating agreement between CN and CP that previously shared rail yard facilities in the port precinct.

The following map shows the BI Line within the red rectangle.



Train Proximity to Residences

As shown in the following three photos, CN freight trains travel extremely close to homes. The photo below is taken from Hastings Street, looking south towards Pender Street. The yellow house shown in this photo, 1016 E. Pender Street, is over 115 years old and the trains pass within five feet of a toddler's bedroom. There are no noise barriers between the train tracks and any buildings along the BI line.



The photo below was taken from the Keefer Street overpass, looking north towards Pender Street:



The photo below was taken from the Keefer Street overpass, looking south towards East Georgia Street:



Approximately 1,200 residents live in the Stamps Place social housing complex, which is one lot plus one road away from the tracks. Hundreds more live in other buildings within one block of the tracks.

Residential density around the BI Line will increase significantly in the near future. There are some light industrial and retail buildings next to the BI Line, however both sides of the BI Line are zoned for any future development to be residential. Two major developments, planned and approved long before the increase in rail traffic, are under construction. Strathcona Village, a new condo development with 280 units on the north side of Hastings Street, is sold out and will begin occupancy soon. The BI Line passes right next to it.

The Villa Cathay nursing home is currently constructing a ten story residential tower located less than 30 meters from the BI Line at Union Street. In the photo below you can see the railway tracks, and just behind them the crane that's building the new tower of the nursing home.



Noise Issues

Strathcona is a quiet neighbourhood with extensive traffic calming. There are generally no significant sources of exterior nighttime noise near the BI Line, except for traffic noise along Venables/Prior Street and Hastings Street.

Two or three freight trains usually pass through the BI Line during the night, often making very loud shunting noises. Residents regularly hear shunting between 12 AM and 4 AM, for many minutes at a time. As the BI Line makes five level crossings in one kilometer, trains whistle a lot. Train whistles/horns disturb residents up to several blocks away. Nighttime noise in particular is disturbing sleep and causing health, productivity, and school studies to suffer. Vehicles frequently cut through side streets to get around trains, adding further to noise and pollution in the neighbourhood.

Further details on effects on individual residents is provided in the letters that are included in this complaint filing.

The City has informed us that part of the CTA's investigation process is to ask the municipality whether residents have complained about noise. Please note that prior to November 17, 2017, the City of Vancouver's usual practice was to not document complaints about train noise. Residents who called the City of Vancouver's 3-1-1 line regarding train noise were told that it was not a municipal issue, and no systematic records of the complaints were kept.

Prior Attempts at Dispute Resolution

The following Strathcona residents informed the SRA that they emailed formal complaints to CN regarding noise on the BI Line in 2017, i.e. more than 60 days ago. Some also complained to CN about safety and environmental issues:

Anne Thompson
Paul Jackson
Shane and Lindsay Geddes
Daniel Ingram
Joachim Sehrbrock
Brayden Dyczkowski

At least seven other residents that we are aware of have emailed CN with complaints in 2018.

The responses that residents have received from CN said that complaints are being "documented", but CN has not proposed or committed to any action to address their issues. At least one resident emailed CN after receiving "their generic response letter" asking them to address the specific questions and concerns in her original letter, and never heard back.

Community Requests

Strathcona residents accept the need for trains to move through our neighbourhood as long as it is done safely, and without harming the health of the people who live, work, and visit here. We strongly oppose the current practice of using the BI Line as a 24/7 freight train assembly yard.

The Strathcona Residents Association seeks the following outcomes for the BI Line:

1. That loud noises from trains, such as shunting, horns, and whistles, be eliminated between 8 PM and 7:30 AM.
2. That trains used on the BI Line between 8 PM and 7:30 AM use quiet engines
3. That noise levels near the BI line be regularly monitored at four equally-spaced locations between Cordova and Venables/Prior, with federal and provincial standards enforced.

Yours very sincerely,
Su-Laine Brodsky and Dan Jackson, Strathcona Residents Association