

To: Canadian Transportation Agency
CC: CN Rail, City of Vancouver

Subject: Noise along Burrard Inlet Rail Line in Vancouver
April 4, 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 at least 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.

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

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>

letter to one resident in August 27, “The movement of our rail traffic to the waterfront was handled by an outside contract. As this is no longer the case, we now must take on this work internally which necessitates the use of our own rail corridors.”

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 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 around 100 metres 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. The complex will eventually house 224 seniors. 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 at night, including between 12 AM and 4 AM, for many minutes at a time. As the BI Line makes five level crossings in one kilometre, trains whistle a lot, disturbing residents up to several blocks away. Vehicles frequently cut through side streets to get around trains that block intersections for up to 28 minutes at a time, adding further to noise and pollution in the neighbourhood. We have heard from residents who say that the noise is the worst it has been in 14, 18, or 50 years.

Here are some video and audio files taken by residents who filmed and/or recorded trains next their homes:

- Video of shunting (see video description for times of shunting episodes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaoKpHaFs_Y
- Audio of nighttime shunting: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0Cikf24AzLzU3oxZ1ZwVFFqdnc/view?usp=sharing>
- Video of engine noise at 2 am: <https://youtu.be/BiDEXddvq3l>

Substantial Interference

Train noise from the BI Line is definitely causing substantial interference with the ordinary comfort or convenience of living according to the standards of the average person.

Details on effects on some individual residents are provided in the letters that are included in this complaint filing. In a community meeting in March 2018, we were also informed that loss of sleep was affecting the studies of school-aged children and exacerbating existing health and stress problems for families. Additionally, a resident wrote to us about a couple who used to own a home in the townhouse complex on Pender Street between the BI Line and Glen Drive, and sold it in 2017:

“In the spring our neighbours... lost their personal battle with being able to cope with the night train noise and subsequently sold and moved. They had only owned their unit for about a year, so had to pay major penalties to break the conditions of their mortgage. In short, the couple had not had a full night's sleep since the beginning of the increased train traffic in January. Instead of getting better and more used to it, as the year went on and the season got hotter, the need to sleep with windows open came which meant even increased noise (and less coping).”

In summary, the impacts on residents include loss of sleep, headaches, the need to use sleep aids and earplugs, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, stress, behavioural issues in children, people needing to sell their homes, and loss of property value.

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

Twelve Strathcona residents, named in Appendix 1 to this letter, informed the SRA that they emailed formal complaints to CN regarding noise on the BI Line more than 60 days ago. Some also complained to CN about safety and environmental issues:

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.

Please note that rescheduling nighttime trains to daytime would not be an acceptable solution. Trains running on the BI Line block Venables/Prior Street, a major arterial and bus route. This leads to enormous traffic disruption, erratic and unsafe driving, and severe public transit delays. Adding to the volume of daytime trains would worsen all of these problems.

Given that residents are disturbed by a variety of types of train noise including whistles, the only practical solution we can see is for CN to arrange for alternative routes for its nighttime trains, e.g. using the facilities of an outside contractor as it did prior to 2017.

Yours very sincerely,
Strathcona Residents Association

Council Members: Dan Jackson
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SRA Railroad Working Group:
Su-Laine Brodsky (main contact)
Dima Brodsky
Anne Thompson

Lindsay Geddes
Andrew Ling

Appendix 1: Residents Who Have Complained to CN Regarding Noise

Twelve Strathcona residents, named in Appendix 1 to this letter, informed the SRA that they emailed formal complaints to CN regarding noise on the BI Line more than 60 days ago.

1. Anne Thompson
2. Paul Jackson
3. Shane and Lindsay Geddes
4. Daniel Ingram
5. Joachim Sehrbrock
6. Brayden Dyczkowski
7. Fernando Iturri
8. Mariana Iturri
9. Jim Harrison
10. Danny Cheng
11. Su-Laine Brodsky
12. Daisy Cassels