

Baltimore faces a Huge Question, and few know it.

Thanks very much to Hallie Miller for her article: “Protesters rally against proposed Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel Project diesel vent outside elementary school” (Sept. 4, 2018) shining light on the plan to build a 60’ diesel exhaust shaft right next to homes, and directly across from the new 21st Century school. This is just one bit of fallout from the B&P Tunnel project.

Miller did a great job of capturing a complex issue, but I do need to clarify a remark on which I am quoted/referenced. The Environmental Impact Statement which declared this project’s toxic output “within safe margins” used only the two daily freight trains currently contracted for its level of diesel/freight pollution numbers – thus using them as future projections. This was despite national projections of a 40% increase in freight and likely much higher increases here based on statements from CSX, Norfolk Southern, Hogan and MDOT all celebrating how this tunnel will open up a freight route to the port. This “two train” data was mistakenly reported as the “two track” data. (Quote from article: “The last statement examined a two-track replacement, which Amlie said lowered the numbers.”) The FRA’s refusal to compute possible harm on realistic projections – or on an escalating scale to the worst case of the new tunnels’ capacity of around 150 freight trains per day (388 capacity minus Amtrak and MARC) appears disingenuous if not dishonest.

Baltimore faces a question that determines the shape, safety and livability of the city for at least the next hundred years. Ask any urban Baltimorean: Is it a good idea to run a huge, double-stack freight railroad right through Baltimore City? Will the industrialization, noise, pollution, vibration, hazardous cargo of toxins, explosives and flammables, and possible catastrophic dangers help or harm the city, its safety, livability and real estate values? Consider the less than stellar rail-freight safety records, and the long, drawn out court fights to wear out or dismiss victims. (Google the Lac-Megantic oil train explosion, or oil train explosions in general. There’s a reason they call them bomb trains.) Because THAT is what the B&P tunnel project does. This is not just about some poor minority communities in West Baltimore, though it hurts them – hurts them bad to the point of destruction; the trains have to go in and come out of the tunnels, too. This is a swath of heavy industry right through a city

struggling to shine its best. The Project pushers PR thrust is to celebrate the Passenger aspect, while downplaying the freight part of the project right up to the brink of denial – and in some cases using word play to avoid the subject. This denies Baltimore the chance to answer this crucial, city-shaping question.

Baltimore has two rail challenges to solve: One is opening our old bottleneck for passengers. The other is maximizing rail accessibility to the port.

Passenger trains must, of course, go through the city. But carving a swath for more, larger freight trains through town only serves the freight companies' interests at the expense of the safety and health of Baltimore and its citizens. Whom does a combined solution benefit? Not Baltimore, but the freight companies' bottom line as they ride Amtrak's coattails for Federal dollars.

Hurray for Amtrak! Hurray for freight! – but get it RIGHT. If we are truly serious about making the most of Maryland's Port AND about the best for Baltimore, we need to build the dedicated freight line around the city through industrially zoned areas. This was proposed years ago to CSX, who refused to spend the money. A couple of routes avoiding the city have been considered. They should be revisited.

Laura Amlie

President, Residents Against The Tunnels