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Revised coal shipping plan approved - Patrick Brown

Port Metro Vancouver has approved a revised shipping plan that would see deep-sea vessels loaded at the Fraser Surrey Docks. It replaces a previous plan that saw coal loaded into barges to be towed to Texada Island. The coal would then have been loaded into deepsea vessels at a Lafarge facility on Texada.

The new plan involves the same amount of coal—four million tons a year. But instead of 640 barges, some 80 Panamax-size ships will be loaded each year. However, a longer ship loader will be required, and extensive dredging would be necessary so that there is room in the river to turn the ships around. The ships are 225 metres in length.

It is also possible that the plan anticipates the construction of a new ten-lane highway bridge over the river, replacing the existing Massey Tunnel, which limits the draft of ships in the

river.

Fraser Surrey Docks are 'evaluating timing' of the development because of a slump in thermal coal prices which might make the operation uneconomic. Critics have also suggested that the dredging of a large turning basin would have to be continuous because of silting. The ecology of the river, which hosts large salmon runs and many other aquatic creatures, would also be affected.

Current international negotiations on climate change may make thermal coal obsolete. But Port Metro Vancouver says it isn't responsible for evaluating the environmental effects of burning the coal, only of shipping it.

The permit requires that construction must be started within one year, and completed within four years. ✍

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