BELLINGHAM, Wash. -- The issue of exporting coal to China takes center stage in Whatcom County where a Seattle based company is proposing to build a large multi-commodity terminal at Cherry Point.

SSA Marine is prepared to spend $500 million on the Gateway Pacific Terminal which would receive coal by train from Wyoming and ship it to Asia. The proposed location is already zoned industrial and lies between the Alcoa and BP refineries near Ferndale.
"If we're going to be part of a global economy, we want to be not just a buyer, but we want to be a seller," says Craig Cole, spokesman for SSA Marine and former Whatcom County councilman.

The private company is also promising to hire around 1800 temporary employees during the construction phase and after the project is complete, hire around 300 permanent employees.

But the proposal is also garnering opposition. Many are not thrilled about the health impacts of coal dust, climate change from the burning of exported coal in China and a disruption of the Bellingham waterfront where the coal filled train cars would pass every day.

"It all doesn't add up," says Dan Pike, Bellingham Mayor.

Among his biggest concerns is the doubling of train cars that will be used if the terminal opens.

"It will have an impact on noise issues, it will have an impact on public safety issues, it will have an impact on economic development." he says.

Coal trains already pass through Bellingham on their way to British Columbia where they are exported.

"Bottom line, we already get the trains, we just don't get the jobs," says Cole.

If and when SSA Marine applies for permits, an Environmental Impact Study must be completed which could take years. Cole says it would likely be around 4 years before the terminal would be online.

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