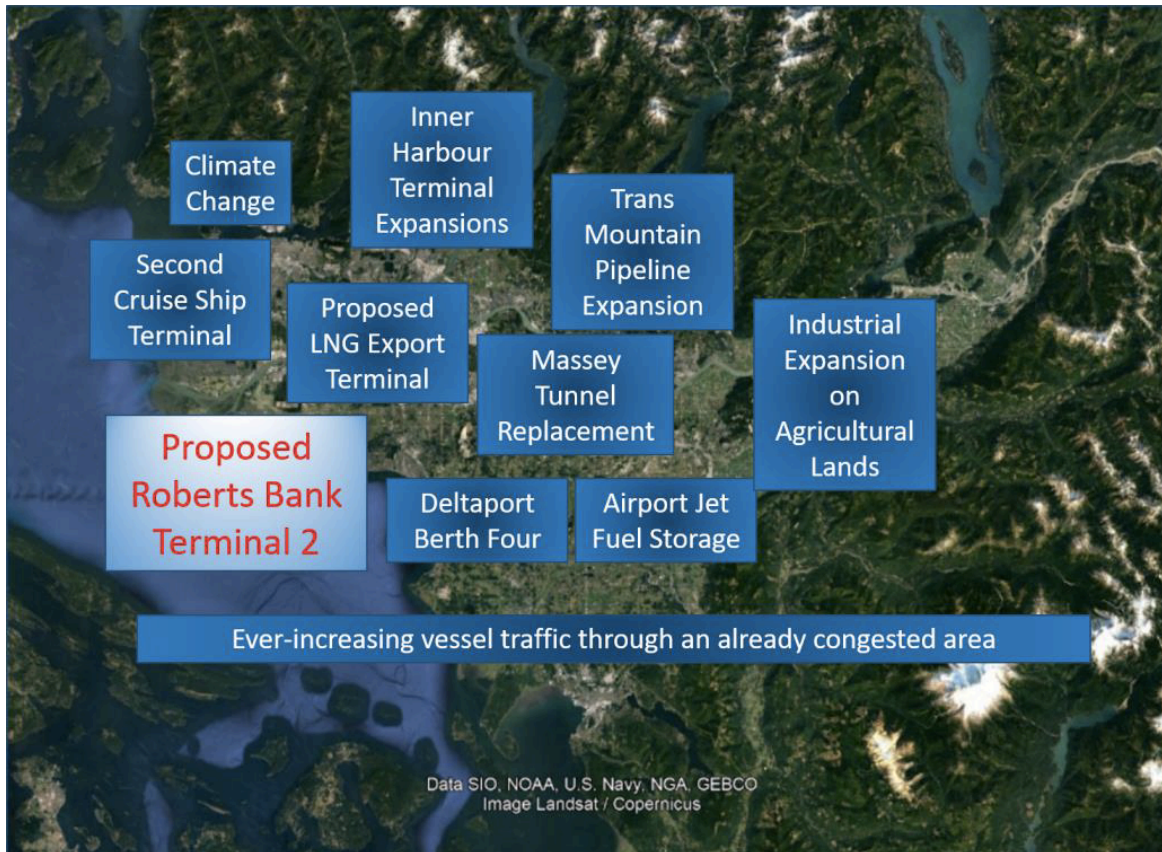


The Fraser Estuary is on the Brink of Collapse. The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority's Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Project could be the Tipping Point

The Fraser River supports communities and wildlife all through British Columbia. But its estuary, in Delta BC, is in trouble and may well be on the brink of ecological collapse. The Roberts Bank Terminal 2 (RBT2) Project may be the tipping point. RBT2 and the cumulative impact of other projects planned for the Lower Fraser are pushing the estuary into environmental decline.

Fraser Estuary Projects Destroying Remaining Natural Habitat Compounded By Climate Change



In addition to industrial development, coastal squeeze caused by sea-level rise is one of the climate threats to birds along the Pacific Flyway. The research identifies at least 14 shorebirds and waterfowl that will be negatively impacted by sea-level rise all along the flyway including Dunlin, Western Sandpiper and Black-bellied Plover.

Add in the port and industrial projects and it is clear the Fraser Estuary is on the brink of collapse, with the likelihood the chain of the Pacific Flyway will be broken, as Environment and Climate Change Canada predicted in 2005, if further port development is permitted on Roberts Bank.

As goes the estuary, so goes the Fraser River.

So, is the RBT2 Project sustainable?

Answering just one question determines if RBT2 should be approved. The question - are the significant adverse environmental effects that will result from building RBT2 fully mitigable?

On August 24 2020 Environment and Climate Change Canada Minister Jonathan Wilkinson acknowledged, "...that even taking into account mitigation measures the Review Panel determined that significant adverse effects to fish and fish habitat, including species at risk, human health, and current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes, among others were likely" (CEAA #2067). So is RBT2 mitigable? Is the project environmentally sustainable?

Not according to many who say NO, including:

1. Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) scientists. In reports and published papers in independent internationally peer-reviewed scientific journals submitted to the Environmental Assessment Review Panel, the scientists said the project's impacts on biofilm (a critical food source for millions of shorebirds) "are anticipated to be high in magnitude, permanent, irreversible, and continuous". In other words, unmitigable. (CEAA # 1146).
2. ECCC scientists also rebutted the Port's claim that biofilm can be created, stating, "there are no accepted techniques to remediate for functional biofilm for shorebirds on intertidal mudflats", nor enough other available habitat to replace what will be lost if RBT2 is built. Therefore mitigation for this habitat loss is not possible. (CEAA #1146)
3. The Canadian Wildlife Service states Western Sandpipers have been declining at 2 percent a year and are a priority for conservation action. The entire population of Western Sandpipers risks being wiped out if RBT2 is built.
4. Forty or more environmental and other groups including BC Nature, Birds Canada and Nature Canada have all registered opposition, stating RBT2 will result in significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be mitigated.
5. The cities of Richmond, Delta and White Rock, all of whom voted to oppose RBT2.
6. Major international environmental organizations such as BirdLife International (which lists the Fraser Estuary as an "Important Bird and Biodiversity Area" in danger) and the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network have submitted concerns about the proposed project.
7. Recently published UBC research states the Fraser Estuary is on the brink of collapse and 102 species are at risk of extinction. (Kehoe et al. 2020. Conservation Science and Practice Journal)
8. Internationally-recognized scientists (Professors Pat Baird (SFU: CEAA #2016) and Peter Beninger (University of Nantes: CEAA #2005)), experts in ecosystem function, have vigorously challenged the Port science; science which has never been published in an independent peer-reviewed scientific journal.
9. Georgia Strait Alliance and Ecojustice say endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales, already subject to increasing levels of underwater noise as well as lack of Chinook salmon, will be at increased risk of extinction as a result of RBT2. VFPA admits that RBT2 negatively affects juvenile salmon and their access to rearing habitats.
10. Raincoast Conservation (CEAA #647) and Rivers Institute (M. Rosenau: CEAA #663) state RBT2 will impede the ability of juvenile salmon to access rearing habitat in the estuary and increase the risk of predation.
11. Wiley's Ecology and Evolution Journal research paper "Sandpipers go with the Flow" posits protecting stopover habitat such as Roberts Bank is crucial for shorebird conservation.

If not mitigable and not environmentally sustainable, is RBT2 otherwise justifiable? Is an additional terminal needed on Roberts Bank because West Coast Canada is running out of terminal capacity as Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) claims?

Not according to the statistics. Despite claims of record growth, VFPA's 2019 and 2020 volumes have remained basically flat compared to 2018. Its twelve-year compound annual growth rate is below 3 percent. Global Container Terminals and DP World are both adding capacity in Vancouver and DP World announced plans for a large expansion at Prince Rupert, adding up to 5 million container capacity (Twenty Foot Equivalent Units - TEU) by 2030.

All this gives the West Coast potential capacity of over 10 million containers (TEUs), sufficient to accommodate Canadian trade for decades to come without ever building RBT2.

How can the environmental values of the Fraser Estuary and the life of the river be saved? Here is how:

- ✓ Make Roberts Bank a National Marine Conservation Area.
- ✓ Expand the Fraser River Delta designation as a UN "Wetland of International Importance" (Ramsar Site) to encompass all of Roberts Bank,
- ✓ Provide immediate protection to biofilm habitat at Roberts Bank by designating it a Provincial Ecological Reserve.
- ✓ Place a cap on the number of vessel transits through the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Salish Sea.
- ✓ No more port development on Roberts Bank.
- ✓ Diversify trade expansion by maximizing the potential of the port facilities at Prince Rupert.