February 12, 2016

City Council President Lynette Gibson McElhaney
Oakland City Hall
1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza
Oakland, CA 94612

RE: Potential Negative Health and Safety Impacts of Transporting Coal

Dear Council President McElhaney and Councilmembers:

The Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association (ACCMA), representing 4,200 East Bay physicians, would like to express concern about the potential negative health and safety impacts of transporting coal through the proposed bulk commodities terminal facility in the former Oakland Army Base. Permitting coal transport could adversely affect the public health by increasing exposure to particulate matter and toxic substances and could negatively impact the already compromised air-quality of our region. Moreover, any effects would likely have a disproportionate impact on residents living in close proximity to rail lines who already experience health disparities and some of the worst health outcomes in our community.

It is well documented that coal dust contains PM2.5 and other harmful fine particles that have been linked to lung damage, asthma, heart disease, cancer, adverse birth outcomes, and premature death along with increases in hospitalization, emergency department visits and lost days of work and school. Alameda County Public Health Department analysis has shown that East and West Oakland children are already hospitalized for asthma twice as much as children under five elsewhere in the county. The California Environmental Protection Agency, World Health Organization, and other institutions have specified there is no clear cut safe level of exposure to PM2.5 particles, suggesting that current federal regulatory standards for PM2.5 may not be adequate to protect the public health. Coal dust also contains heavy metals including mercury, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, lead and nickel, which have been associated with increased risk of cancer, birth defects, genetic defects, endocrine disruption, and neurological damage. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s (BAAQMD) Community Air Risk Evaluation (CARE) program already identified Oakland and the City of Alameda as areas where air pollution contributes most to poor health impacts and where sensitive populations, defined as youth and seniors are most vulnerable to air pollution. Diesel emissions have also been shown to contribute to asthma and other health conditions. Other concerns about transporting coal through our community include: the risk of environmental contamination of agricultural lands, drinking water and our natural environment; and, the possibility of catastrophic derailments, spills, fires and explosions.
In light of these concerns, the ACCMA urges the Oakland City Council to safeguard the health of our community and prohibit the export of coal from the proposed bulk commodities export terminal at the Oakland Army Base until there is a proven safe method. If you have any questions or wish to discuss these concerns, please contact Donald Waters, ACCMA Executive Director, at 510-654-5383 or dwaters@accma.org.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Arthur M. Chen, MD
President

cc. Libby Schaaf, Mayor of Oakland
    Oakland City Councilmembers
    Oakland City Administrator
    Muntu Davis, MD, Public Health Officer, Alameda County