

SAN JUAN ISLAND'S SOLID WASTE TRANSFER STATION  
SUMMARY  
PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING  
JUNE 19, 2007

**OVERVIEW**

On June 19, 2007, the San Juan County Department of Community Development and Planning hosted a public meeting concerning an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for San Juan Island's Solid Waste Transfer Station. Forty members of the community attended. The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comment about what should be taken into account in assessing the environmental impact of constructing a new solid waste transfer station either at the existing site (near Sutton Road) or at a new site. Participants were also asked to address the questions:

Are there reasonable alternatives to constructing a new solid waste transfer station either at the existing site or a new site?

What measures might be used to mitigate the potentially adverse environmental impacts of constructing a new transfer station for San Juan Island?

After a series of brief presentations, meeting attendees posed questions and presented comments to County staff and the project's consultant team.

The meeting began with reports from Shannon FitzGerald with the San Juan County Department of Community Development and Planning, Gary Harshman of AMEC Environmental and Ed Hale of the San Juan County Public Works Department. The three briefly described State Environmental Policy Act compliance, the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, and the project's 2007 anticipated schedule and milestones.

Todd Peterson of Norton-Arnold & Company, the facilitator, guided the ensuing discussion. Citizens presented their comments and concerns about the project and process and what they would like to see happen in the future.

**SUMMARY**

What follows is a summary of the comments, questions and ideas presented during the meeting's discussion:

**General Concerns.** Meeting participants were divided about where to site a newly constructed solid waste transfer facility for San Juan Island. As detailed below, some advocated the continued use of the site near Sutton Road while others recommended choosing "*a site with room for expansion, which is not already environmentally compromised. Build it from scratch correctly, with room for recycling.*"

**Airfield Conflict.** Several participants expressed concern about siting a new transfer station in close proximity to the southern end of San Juan Island Airport. They commented that building the transfer station near the airfield would incur liability, would be out of compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and would increase the number of bird strikes. A representative comment: "*Safety is critical. Siting a transfer station at the southern end of the*

*airfield would increase bird strikes and endanger pilots. The FAA would never approve it.”* Several citizens noted that as the Island’s population continues to grow, flights to and from the island will increase, and a runway extension to the south will be inevitable. One citizen said that as housing becomes more expensive on the Island, more people will have to commute to work from the mainland, necessitating larger planes and a longer runway. These citizens said that a new transfer station does not belong near the airfield. It was pointed out, however, that the 20 year master plan for the airport does not include a runway extension.

**Economics.** A number of people had questions about the economics of the project. How much is it going to cost? How will it be paid for? What services will be available at the transfer station? Can all be services be offered at one location or should there be two sites? Representative comments: *“San Juan County needs to share cost analysis information with the public as soon as it’s available.”* Participants asked that the economic analysis present a cost/benefit study of all sites under consideration. A citizen said that proximity to the ferry should not eliminate consideration of more inland sites.

**Environmental Requirements.** As noted during Solid Waste Advisory Committee and public meetings in 2006, complying with state environmental regulations continues to be a high priority. Attendees wondered what services could be accommodated at the current site. One participant advocated analyzing the use of land to the south of the area currently in use. Several participants noted that having comparable transfer stations to look at in terms of size, drainage and services would be helpful. One commented: *“We know the current transfer station has problems but what solutions and type of expansion are possible there?”*

One citizen said it was time to move beyond Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) thinking and to consider the environmental health of the island. *“Do the right thing now with new technology and construction, not the easy fix.”*

**Develop Design Proposals.** Several citizens recommended that the County develop specific design proposals/schematics for citizen evaluation and response. One participant said, *“We need a concrete proposal and price.”*

**New Site vs. Existing Site.** Some attendees recommended constructing a new transfer station at a new site as soon as possible, especially in light of the state of the current facility. Those advocating the selection of a new site said that the transfer station’s current location near Sutton Road is:

Too small

Too steep

Constrained and contaminated by the old landfill and solid waste incinerator

Too expensive to expand

Unsafe for workers

Out of compliance with Department of Ecology regulations

Causing the death of trees adjacent to the property

A representative comment: *A new transfer station could operate more effectively and efficiently (than the current site), accommodate future growth and meet environmental standards.*

Others said that there has been too much emphasis on a new transfer station for San Juan Island, and that the existing facility could do the job if redeveloped responsibly. These participants said that other sites being considered are unacceptable for safety or environmental

reasons or were acquired without adequate public involvement. They said that the process of site selection was costing too much and going on too long; rather than spending money on analyzing unacceptable alternatives, the County should put the money into making the current site work. One participant commented, *“I am concerned about the size of a new site and how much impervious surface will be created.”* Some attendees emphasized that the County should clean up and continue to use the site historically dedicated to waste management rather than degrading a new site.

### **Possible Adverse Environmental Impacts for Inclusion in the EIS**

The Determination of Significance for this project lists the following potentially adverse environmental impacts resulting from the construction of a new solid waste transfer station on San Juan Island:

- Traffic
- Noise
- Lights
- Air quality (odor, dust)
- Vectors (rodents, insects, birds)
- Litter
- On-site storage of household hazardous waste
- Storm water
- Wetlands

To this list, scoping meeting participants added:

- Airport/flight safety specifically in relation to bird strikes
- Increase in impervious surface
- Water consumption
- Steep slopes
- Seepage into groundwater
- Contamination of neighboring properties wells by hazardous waste via wash down processes which use fresh water
- Safety of wildlife
- Visual buffer
- Sound buffer
- Light pollution at night
- Social equity/fairness/environmental justice assessment
- Provision of essential services/potential need to add new services
- Compliance with environmental laws
- Economic impacts on surrounding residential and recreational properties, i.e. impact on real estate values.

### **Facility Services.**

Several participants noted that the solid waste services offered will determine the size of the transfer station and will drive the siting process. It was therefore important, they felt, to

define those services. (At the meeting, standard transfer station services were identified as: managing self-hauled and commercially hauled waste, recycling and complying with County and State health and environmental regulations. Green waste recycling, expanded household hazardous waste collection and materials exchange were defined as possible future options.)

Others noted that some of the services being proposed for a future facility (for example, waste exchange and green waste composting) are already being provided by local businesses, which should be supported. Some of those in attendance recommended putting a price on “optional” solid waste services such as green waste recycling and materials exchange.

Participants pointed out the option of operating both the existing facility and a new transfer station on the Island.

### **Education**

Participants emphasized the value of education in promoting waste reduction.

**Environmental Impact Statement Process.** Participants asked that the timeline for the EIS and site selection be made clear. Some pointed out the need for a long-term solution that meets immediate needs and complies with regulations. Several citizens said that the EIS must provide uniform economic and visual analysis for all sites under consideration. Others noted that the EIS needs to clearly identify the size, location and services offered at all proposed sites.

**Next Steps.** Citizens’ comments will be addressed in a Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement developed by San Juan County. Citizens will have the opportunity to comment on the draft EIS and on a conditional use permit issued by the County for the Island’s solid waste transfer facility. The San Juan County Council will make the final decision about the site for the facility.