



**BC
Dock
Owners
Coalition**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CSRD Signals Replacement of Rail Trail with Commuter Train Mega-Project

*Communities from Sicamous to Armstrong misled by promise of walking trail that will
instead see Mara Lake industrialized for transit purposes*

November 23, 2021 (SICAMOUS, B.C.) – Following months of promoting the *Shuswap North Okanagan Rail Trail*, it can be revealed that the Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD) intends instead to rebuild the old CP railway along the Western shore of Mara Lake in the District of Sicamous. There will ultimately be no “linear park” for the walking, hiking, and biking enjoyment of residents. Instead, a new railway will stand in its place.

The BC Dock Owner’s Coalition has obtained a copy of a confidential agreement confirming CSRD’s intent to build a “commuter rail” on the western edge of Mara Lake, effectively cutting off access to the lake from the west for all residents, visitors, and recreational users.

“Why is CSRD rebuilding the railroad?” asked BC Dock Owners spokesperson Natalie Sorkilmo of Sicamous. “CSRD has told our community for years that it was building a walking trail open to all. Now we discover their true intention has nothing to do with a “linear park” and everything to do with industrializing Mara Lake through the construction of a new railway. No one will be walking the ‘rail trail’ when CSRD is done. The entire Rail Trail project appears to have been a sham.”

The ‘crossing agreement’ which CSRD seeks to impose on Mara Lake upland owners, and which was obtained by the Dock Owners Coalition, contains the following specific language:

2.1 - The Licensee acknowledges that the Licence Area is situated within the Owner’s Lands, a portion of which is used to actively operate a public trail, and which the Owner may in the future, **utilize as part of a transportation corridor (such as for commuter rail) and that the Owner’s ability to safely and efficiently operate same is paramount [emphasis added]**.

“Construction of a commuter railway will be multi-year, hugely disruptive, and environmentally damaging,” said Sorkilmo. “We have every reason to believe CSRD will not permit anyone onto the new railway area for reasons of ‘safety and liability’ – as defined by CSRD. Any entry, by anyone, onto the railbed will be treated as an act of trespass by CSRD. This will forever change the character of Mara Lake.”

Appearing to confirm the confidential commuter rail plan are excessive construction costs and budget over-runs associated with the rail trail project. Project costs have soared from a planned \$13M to nearly \$23M, an eye-watering amount for a recreational trail. These expenditures are likely driven by a level of engineering not necessary for a simple hiking area, but one which would make sense for an operational railway carrying railcars and people.



“The old CP railway carried hundreds of thousands of tonnes of freight. Why is it that this same infrastructure suddenly cannot withstand the weight of pedestrians and cyclists?” demanded Sorkilmo. “Who will pay for this mega-project? Who will use it for that matter? Where is the feasibility study? And where is the community consultation?”

No information is available about the involvement of individual municipalities in the commuter rail mega-project. CSRD’s By-law 5755 states that impacted municipalities must pay a percentage of the ongoing operating costs of the ‘Rail Corridor Trail Service.’ It is not clear that any of these communities has ever been consulted on bearing the cost of a fully operational commuter railway. But because the rail trail has been promoted as running from Sicamous to Armstrong, questions are now being raised about impacts on communities all along the intended commuter railway route.

“A railway has to lead to somewhere,” observed Sorkilmo. “This is no longer just a Mara Lake problem. It’s a Shuswap problem and a North Okanagan problem. Residents of all impacted communities deserve answers from their elected representatives and particularly from the municipal bureaucrats who have devised and driven this disastrous scheme.”

To view a side-by-side comparison of the differences between the previous CP crossing agreement and the new CSRD agreement (including CSRD’s stated plan for commuter rail), visit: www.bcdockowners.ca/documents.

To view a *Myth vs. Reality* document addressing claims by CSRD about the rail trail, dock usage, and the crossing agreements, visit: www.bcdockowners.ca/documents.

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About the BC Dock Owners Coalition:

The BC Dock Owners Coalition is a group of homeowners, seasonal residents, community members, business owners, and job-creators who are deeply connected to the Shuswap and other communities across the province. They have formed the BC Dock Owners Coalition following two years of unsuccessful attempts to find a mutually beneficial solution to the impact of CSRD’s By-Law 900 and the draconian “crossing agreements” proposed by CSRD which would permit CSRD to remove semi-waterfront docks without cause. The BC Dock Owners Coalition seeks one thing: the continued right for Upland Owners to cross the publicly owned rail trail in order to access their legal docks.

For more Information:

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