

*Fairbank,  
Maslin,  
Maullin,  
Metz &  
Associates*

**FM3**

*Public Opinion Research  
& Strategy*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Dave Metz & Miranda Everitt  
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

RE: Results of a Survey of Oakland Voters on Coal Transport

DATE: February 16, 2016

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed 400 telephone interviews with registered Oakland voters likely to participate in the November 2016 election to assess their views on proposal to transport coal through the city by rail for export overseas.<sup>1</sup> The survey found that **Oakland voters are broadly aware of the proposal, and strongly oppose a proposal to transport coal through the city.** Those already aware of the proposal are heavily against it, and when a short description is offered to voters a majority opposes it as well. Further, after a short exchange of supporter and opposition arguments, more than three-quarters (76%) say they oppose the proposal – including 57 percent who oppose it “strongly.” In addition, about half say they are more likely to vote for a City Council member who opposes such a proposal.

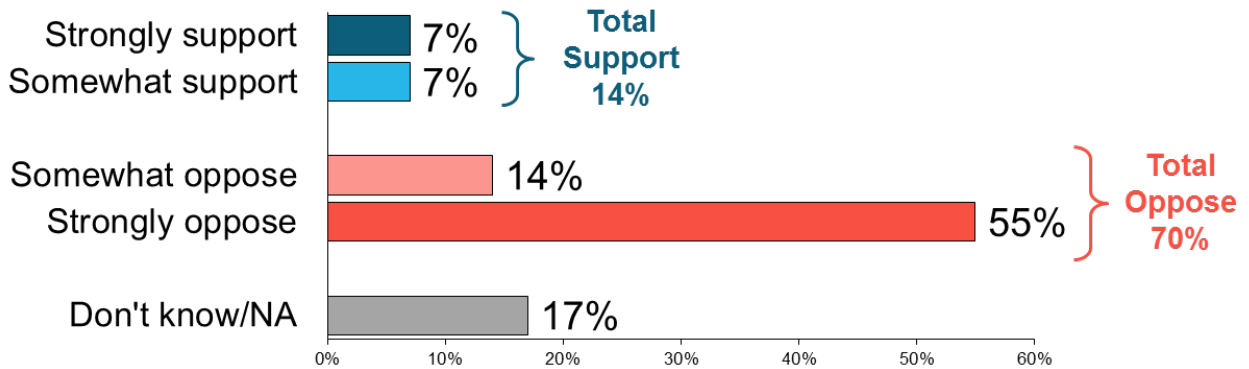
Key specific findings from the survey include the following:

- **Roughly half of voters are aware of the proposal, and that group opposes it five-to-one.** Voters were asked whether they have “seen, heard or read anything about proposals to transport coal by rail through Oakland.” Nearly half (47 percent) indicated that they had, and those voters were then asked whether they support or oppose it. As shown on the following page in **Figure 1**, seven in ten are against the proposal and a 55-percent majority “strongly” opposes it.

12100 Wilshire Blvd Suite 350  
Los Angeles, CA 90025  
Phone: (310) 828-1183  
Fax: (310) 453-6562

1999 Harrison Street Suite 2020  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Phone: (510) 451-9521  
Fax: (510) 451-0384

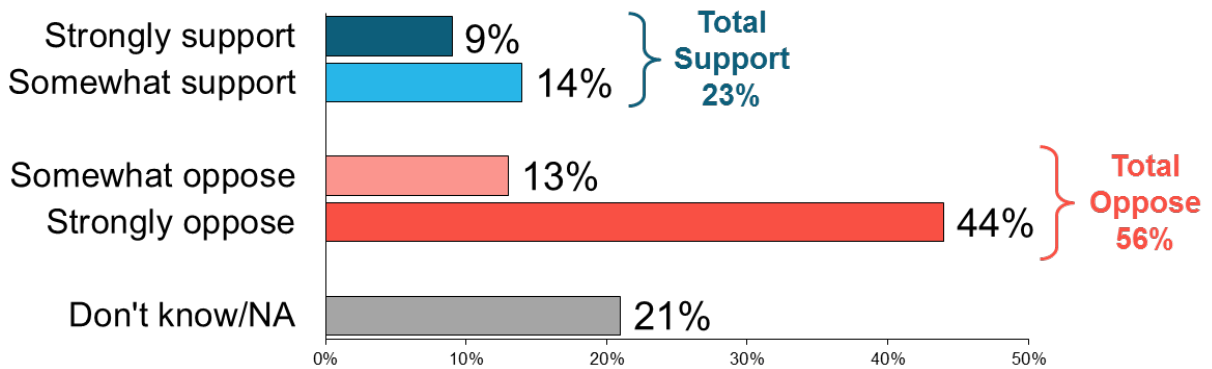
**FIGURE 1:**  
**Support for Coal Transport Proposal**  
*(Among the 47% Familiar with the Proposal)*



- **Among voters overall, a majority opposes the proposal to transport coal by rail through Oakland.** Given a short description of the proposal, Oakland voters oppose it by more than a two-to-one margin (56 percent to 23 percent). The intensity of opposition is remarkable, with nearly five times as many “strongly” opposed (44%) as “strongly” supportive (nine percent). **Figure 2** illustrates these results.

**FIGURE 2:**  
**Support for Coal Transport Proposal Among All Voters**

*There is currently a proposal to build a large export terminal at the former Army Base in West Oakland. This terminal is expected to be completed in 2017 and handle 9 to 10 million tons of goods each year, brought in by rail and loaded onto ships bound for other countries. Recently, the project’s developers have proposed exporting coal mined in Utah through this terminal, making it one of the primary goods to be exported through the new terminal. The coal would be shipped to Asia, where it would be burned in coal-fired power plants. If this proposal were to be approved, at least 5 million tons of coal per year would pass through Oakland on freight trains to this terminal in West Oakland to be moved onto ocean-going vessels. Having heard this, would you support or oppose this proposal to transport coal by rail through Oakland?*



Opposition to the plan cuts across demographic and geographic groups, including:

- ✓ 53% of men and 60% of women;
  - ✓ 54% of voters under age 50 and 59% of those over age 50;
  - ✓ 61% of white voters and 55% of voters of color;
  - ✓ 57% of Democrats and 58% of independents, with GOP voters divided; and
  - ✓ Majorities of voters across income levels.
- **After a brief and balanced exchange of pro and con messages, opposition rises to 76 percent.** Respondents were read a short statement from supporters of the proposal and a short statement from opponents, in rotated order, as detailed below.

*Supporters say that moving coal through the terminal is part of an important plan to move all types of commodities through the old Army base. The builders are using the most modern, efficient and environmentally friendly practices. This plan would make use of space in West Oakland that has been unused and abandoned for decades, add living-wage jobs for local residents and bring millions of dollars of outside investment to our city. Opposing this piece of the plan is just not worth risking Oakland’s economic future.*

*Opponents say that coal-by-rail is an unnecessary and potentially dangerous part of an otherwise-important plan to build a new terminal. Coal dust coming off train cars will lead to increased risk of asthma, bronchitis, and cancer in Oakland – particularly in nearby low-income communities and communities of color. As the world moves away from coal and toward clean, renewable energy, we should not make Oakland a center for this dirty, outdated fuel that drives climate change and hurts public health. The risks are too great and more rail traffic will tie up traffic through Oakland. Developers of the terminal should stick to their original plan – and build a terminal that will ship goods other than coal.*

As shown in **Figure 3** below, opposition to the plan increases by 20 percentage points as voters learn more about it. Significantly, the share who are undecided shrinks from 21 percent to fewer than one in ten (nine percent).

**FIGURE 3:  
Change in Support After Messaging**

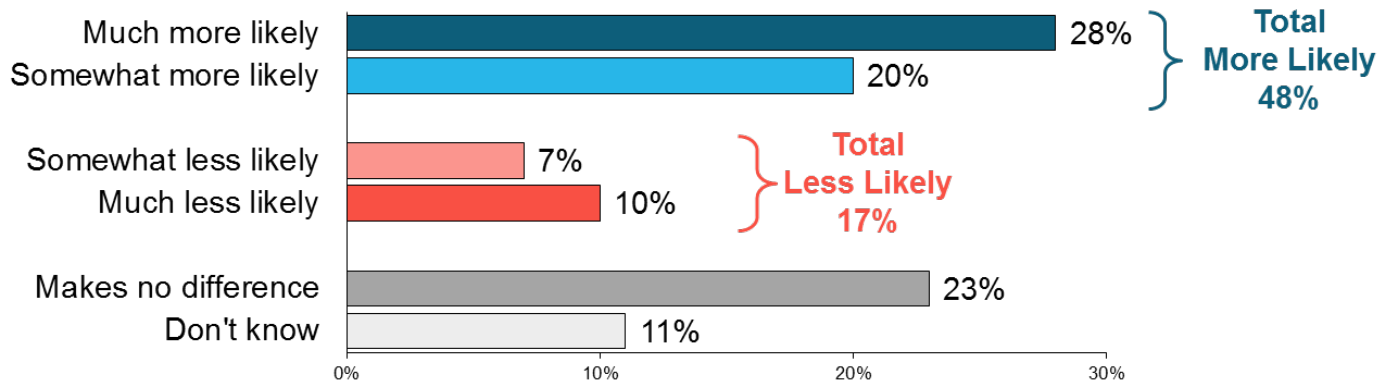
Opinion	Initial Ask	After Messages	Difference
Strongly support	9%	6%	-3%
Somewhat support	14%	9%	-5%
<b>Total support</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>-8%</b>
Somewhat oppose	13%	19%	+6%
Strongly oppose	44%	57%	+13%
<b>Total oppose</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>+20%</b>
Don’t know	21%	9%	-12%

- **By nearly a three-to-one margin, Oakland voters say they are *more* likely to vote for a City Council member who opposes this proposal.** As shown in **Figure 4** on the following page, a plurality of Oakland voters is more likely to vote for a councilmember who opposes the coal transport proposal. Relatively few (17%) say they would be “less likely” to vote for someone who opposed the proposal, while 35% percent say a councilmember’s opposition “makes no difference” to their vote.

**FIGURE 4:**

**Proposal Opposition’s Impact on Vote for City Council**

*Suppose that your City Councilmember opposed this proposal to transport coal by rail through Oakland. Would that make you more likely or less likely to vote for them?*



Taken together, these results indicate that **Oakland voters overwhelmingly oppose a proposal to transport coal by rail through their city.** Those aware of the plan are firmly opposed; after hearing a brief outline of the proposal a majority of all voters indicates opposition; and after hearing pros and cons, more than three-quarters oppose the proposal. Not surprisingly, opposition to the proposal creates more positive feelings among voters toward their City Council member.

<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** Form February 5-9, 2016, FM3 completed 400 telephone interviews (on both landlines and cell phones) with likely November 2016 voters in Oakland. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-4.9% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.