

Agenda Date: May 17, 2006  
Item Number: B1

**Docket:** TR-060091  
**Subject:** Application by Skamania County for a Grade Crossing Protective Fund grant of \$6,575 to install fencing at Home Valley Park, SR-14 at milepost 59.6, Home Valley, Washington

**Staff:** Vicki Elliott, Assistant Director, Transportation Safety  
Mark Halliday, Transportation Specialist  
Lori Halstead, Transportation Specialist  
Ed Harper, Railroad Signal Specialist

### **Recommendation**

Approve disbursement of funds in the amount of \$6,575 from the Grade Crossing Protective Fund for the project proposed by Skamania County at Home Valley, Washington.

### **Background**

For the current biennium, the legislature appropriated \$500,000 for rail safety projects in the Grade Crossing Protective Fund (GCPF). Staff estimates that half of this amount is needed for ongoing improvements to warning devices at public grade crossings and for GCPF administrative costs. The remaining amount, approximately \$250,000, is available for disbursement to parties making other rail safety improvements.

On November 14, 2005, the commission issued a call for projects in Docket TR-051633, inviting interested persons to apply for grants related to increased safety at and around railroad tracks and crossings. Projects could include trespass prevention measures, safety improvements at public or private grade crossings not related to warning devices, or other rail safety projects proposals.

### **Discussion**

On January 17, 2006, Skamania County filed an application with the commission in Docket TR-060091 for a grant of \$6,575 from the GCPF for fencing at Home Valley Park. The park is located at Home Valley, Washington, in the Columbia River Gorge, about ten miles east of Stevenson.

The park is a popular spot for picnics, swimming, and sail boarding during the summer. In addition, it houses three baseball fields, with the primary field only 150 feet from heavily used railroad tracks. The fields are in constant use during baseball and softball season, from about May 1 through September 30 of each year. There is no natural barrier between the park and the tracks. BNSF runs 45 freight trains each day on those tracks at a

speed of 55 miles per hour. In addition, Amtrak runs 2 passenger trains daily at 60 miles per hour. The county reports that on at least one occasion in 2005, officials stopped a little league game when a group of small children had made their way to within 35 feet of the tracks.

The fence will be located on county property. The county will install and maintain the fence. A site visit by commission staff indicates the safety problem described by the county exists and that the proposed fence will limit pedestrian access to the tracks in this area.

This is the first of several projects staff will bring to the commission for action in response to GCPF grant applications. In the past, we have brought them to the commission in a group and we plan to bring the remainder of the applications to you in mid-June. However, there are circumstances in this docket that we believe warrant action on this application now.

In August 2005, a BNSF freight train hit a High Cascade Mills log truck at a crossing adjacent to the park. A contributing factor in this accident was limited sight distance due to vegetation along the railroad right-of-way near the crossing. In an effort to improve visibility at the crossing, the county and railroad agreed to remove the vegetation. This crossing was particularly dangerous because the location of the mill requires truck drivers to pass over the tracks daily. The county estimates there are 80 cars and 20 trucks over the crossing daily. Unfortunately, when the vegetation was removed to improve sight distance, it also took away the only barrier limiting pedestrian access to the railroad tracks from the park. Installing fencing along the edge of the park will remove this hazard.

Softball and baseball season begins in June 2006 and the county is anxious to get the fence installed before they experience a repeat of children wandering too close to the tracks. For this reason, we have singled the county's application for action before the rest of the applications.

### **Conclusion**

Staff recommends the commission approve disbursement of funds in the amount of \$6,575 from the Grade Crossing Protective Fund for the project proposed by Skamania County at Home Valley, Washington.