

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON STATE
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

WASHINGTON STATE)	DOCKET TR-111431
DEPARTMENT OF)	
TRANSPORTATION,)	ORDER 01
)	
Petitioner,)	ORDER AUTHORIZING THE
)	INSTALLATION OF R15-3 “EXEMPT”
)	CROSSING SIGNS AT A HIGHWAY-
COLUMBIA BASIN RAILROAD,)	RAIL GRADE CROSSING AT STATE
)	ROUTE 17
Respondent.)	
.....)	USDOT: 396983B
)	

BACKGROUND

- 1 On August 8, 2011, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) filed a petition with the Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) seeking approval to install R15-3 exempt crossing signs at a railroad-highway grade crossing. The crossing is located at the intersection of State Route 17 (SR-17) and Columbia Basin Railroad’s (Columbia Basin) tracks in the City of Moses Lake in Grant County, Washington.
- 2 Columbia Basin (Respondent) initially consented to entry of an Order by the Commission without further notice or hearing. On November 7, 2011, Columbia Basin clarified its position on WSDOT’s request to exempt the SR-17 crossing, stating that the filing of the Waiver of Hearing is conditional for only as long as train activity is suspended at the crossing.
- 3 The crossing is composed of one main line track. Columbia Basin has suspended operations over the crossing due to a deficiency at a nearby bridge. There is no train traffic over the crossing at this time. It is unknown when train traffic will resume over the crossing.
- 4 WSDOT estimates annual average daily vehicle traffic over the crossing at 17,000, which includes eight percent commercial motor vehicles and 30 school buses. The posted vehicle speed is 50 miles per hour.

- 5 Current warning devices at the crossing include cross bucks, pavement markings, advance warning signs, and cantilever mounted flashing lights.
- 6 WSDOT proposes to install R15-3 exempt signs that are in compliance with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).
- 7 Despite the absence of train traffic, RCW 46.61.350 requires that vehicles carrying passengers for-hire, school buses, and transporters of certain hazardous substances stop at highway-rail grade crossings. The purpose of the stop is to look and listen for trains unless “an official traffic control device as designated by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission pursuant to RCW 81.53.060 (e.g. exempt sign) gives notice that the stopping requirement imposed by this section does not apply.” Because there are no trains currently operating on these tracks, the stopping requirement is not needed. At this time, there is no chance of a motor vehicle colliding with a train at this grade crossing. It is more dangerous for these designated vehicles to stop at this crossing than not to stop because of the risk of rear-end collisions, improper passing, and similar motorist behavior. Grant County Transit operates over the SR-17 crossing and has reported to WSDOT several near miss rear end collisions. On September 29, 2011, there was a rear-end collision involving a Grant County Transit bus and a car at the crossing.
- 8 There is a nearby southbound on-ramp from the Stratford Road interchange onto SR-17 which merges with traffic in close proximity to the crossing. The location of the interchange causes drivers to check for merging traffic on their left while quickly approaching the railroad crossing. A stopped bus or truck at the crossing is a potential and unnecessary conflict at this time.
- 9 The proposed installation of R15-3 exempt crossing signs at SR-17 is in the interest of improving traffic efficiency and reducing the potential for rear end collisions related to vehicle stops. If train traffic resumes over the crossing, the exempt signs should be immediately removed and WSDOT will notify Commission staff of the change in train traffic over the crossing. The parties will re-evaluate the exempt status at that time.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 10 (1) The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission is an agency of the state of Washington having jurisdiction over public railroad-highway grade crossings within the state of Washington. *Chapter 81.53 RCW.*

- 11 (2) The State Route 17 highway-rail grade crossing is a public crossing within the state of Washington.
- 12 (4) RCW 81.53.060 requires that the Commission grant approval prior to the modification of warning devices at public railroad-highway grade crossings within the state of Washington.
- 13 (5) Commission staff investigated the petition and recommended that it be granted with the conditions identified below.
- 14 (6) After review of the petition filed in Docket TR-111431 by the Washington State Department of Transportation on August 8, 2011, and giving due consideration, the Commission grants the petition authorizing the installation of exempt signs at the State Route 17 grade crossing, subject to the following conditions:
- (1) The modifications must conform to those described in the petition.
 - (2) The installation of the R15-3 exempt signs must comply with all applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.
 - (3) Upon completion of the installation authorized herein, Petitioner must notify the Commission.
 - (4) If train traffic resumes over the crossing, the R15-3 exempt signs will be immediately removed and WSDOT will notify Commission staff and a re-evaluation of the exempt status will be initiated.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

- 15 The petition of the Washington State Department of Transportation to install R15-3 exempt signs at a railroad-highway grade crossing at State Route 17 and the Respondent's tracks in the City of Moses Lake, is granted, as follows:
- (1) The modifications must conform to those described in the petition.
 - (2) The installation of the R15-3 exempt signs must comply with all applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.

- (3) Upon completion of the installation authorized herein, Petitioner must notify the Commission.
- (4) If train traffic resumes over the crossing, the R15-3 exempt signs will be immediately removed and WSDOT will notify Commission staff and a re-evaluation of the exempt status will be initiated.

The Commissioners, having determined this Order to be consistent with the public interest, directed the Secretary to enter this Order.

DATED at Olympia, Washington, and effective January 12, 2012.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DAVID W. DANNER, Executive Director and Secretary