

BEFORE THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Petition of

THE BURLINGTON NORTHERN
SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY,

for Modification of Order Regulating
the Speed of Passenger and Freight
Trains in Sumner, Washington

DOCKET NO. TR-990654

AMENDMENT WAIVING
PROVISION OF ORIGINAL
ORDER REQUIRING MEDIAN
BARRIERS ON THE WEST SIDE
OF ZEHNDER STREET

BACKGROUND

- 1 On June 16, 2000, the Commission entered an order approving a request by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF) to modify train speed limits through the City of Sumner to the maximum speeds allowed by the Federal Railroad Administration, subject to certain safety improvements. The safety improvements included the installation of median barriers on the west side of the Zehnder Street highway-rail grade crossing, identified as DOT 085680H.

DISCUSSION

- 2 Median barriers consist of a row of delineators down the centerline of a roadway that extend from the tip of a crossing gate arm to some point in the opposite direction of the tracks. The purpose of the barriers is to prevent motorists from driving around lowered gates. Ideally, median barriers should extend 100 feet or more; however, barriers as short as 50 feet are acceptable where longer installations would conflict with access to other roadways or driveways. Barriers that are too short (i.e. under 50 feet) are considered ineffective due to the room they leave for motorists to drive around both the median barriers and gates.
- 3 The original order did not require median barriers on the east side of the crossing due to Zehnder Street ending at a "T" intersection with Wood Street, approximately 45 feet east of the crossing. This short distance does not allow for the installation of effective median barriers. After the original order was filed, the City of Sumner Public Works Director, WUTC Staff, and Sound Transit representatives conducted an on-site review of the Zehnder Street crossing to assess the optimal placement of the barriers on the west side. At the meeting, it became apparent that installing median barriers on the west side of Zehnder was also not practical due to the presence of the Zehnder/Pease roadway intersection, located approximately 40 feet from the tracks on the north side of the roadway, and the presence of a BNSF siding track located approximately 50 feet west of the BNSF mainline. From the tip of the gate arm to the

point of required clearance from the siding track, a median barrier could only extend about 10 feet.

4 On July 19, 2002, The City of Sumner filed a written request with the Commission to amend order TR-990654 as follows: “The City of Sumner requests that the installation of a median barrier on the west approach at Zehnder be waived. Due to the geometry and side street approaches near the crossing, this is impractical. There is a siding track that interferes with the median. Moving the median west of the siding track blocks truck traffic from Pease Avenue, the entrance to Western Wood Preservative, and the office-building parking lot on the south.”

5 Commission Staff investigated Sumner’s request and recommended that the original order be amended to reflect the request.

6 The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company does not object to the amendment as requested by the City of Sumner.

7 This matter was brought before the Commission at its regularly scheduled open meeting on August 14, 2002. The Commissioners have reviewed the request for amendment and have been advised in the matter. They believe that granting the request is in the public interest, and direct the Secretary to issue the order.

O R D E R

8 THE COMMISSION GRANTS the request of the City of Sumner to amend order TR-990654 to exclude the requirement to install a median barrier on the west side of the Zehnder Street highway-rail grade crossing, in Sumner, Washington.

DATED at Olympia, Washington and effective this 14th of August, 2002.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CAROLE J. WASHBURN, Secretary