

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

WASHINGTON STATE)	DOCKET TR-081229
DEPARTMENT OF)	
TRANSPORTATION,)	ORDER 01
)	
Petitioner.)	ORDER GRANTING PETITION,
)	WITH CONDITIONS, TO MODIFY A
)	PUBLIC HIGHWAY-RAIL GRADE
)	CROSSING AT STEILACOOM
Central Puget Sound Regional)	BOULEVARD SW
Transportation Authority (Sound)	
Transit), City of Lakewood and)	
Tacoma Rail)	USDOT: 085400D
)	UTC: 43A7.88
Respondents.)	
.....)	

BACKGROUND

- 1 On July 2, 2008, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) filed a petition with the Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) seeking approval to modify a railroad-highway grade crossing at Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest in the city of Lakewood in Pierce County. Modifying the crossing is part of the Point Defiance Bypass project.
- 2 The Point Defiance Bypass project is a partnership between Sound Transit and WSDOT to improve reliability of the Amtrak Cascades passenger service between Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, and to extend commuter rail service to Lakewood. Currently, passenger trains slow down to maneuver on the curved tracks along southern Puget Sound and share the track with freight trains. Once construction of the project is complete in 2010, passenger trains will travel on an 18-mile inland “bypass” route that runs along the west side of Interstate 5, from south Tacoma through Lakewood and DuPont. Most freight trains will continue to use the existing tracks along Puget Sound.
- 3 Safety improvements will be made at nine public highway-rail grade crossings in phases over several years. This petition represents safety improvements at one of four grade crossings in phase one. Related petitions are TR-081231, Bridgeport Way Southwest; TR-081230, 108th Street Southwest; and TR-081232, 100th Street Southwest, all crossings are located within the city of Lakewood.

- 4 Prior to the involvement of WSDOT in this project, Sound Transit petitioned the Commission in docket number TR-061195 for approval to make various modifications to the Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest crossing. The Commission approved Sound Transit's petition on September 22, 2006. The proposed modifications approved in docket number TR-061195 were never completed and are now incorporated into the modifications proposed in this docket.
- 5 Respondents Tacoma Rail, Sound Transit and the City of Lakewood have consented to entry of an Order by the Commission without further notice or hearing.
- 6 Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest is a secondary arterial with five lanes of travel; two eastbound and two westbound and a two-way left turn lane. WSDOT reports average annual daily vehicle traffic over the crossing at 20,170 in 2006, with 2.3 percent of the traffic involving commercial motor vehicles at the afternoon peak. The crossing is part of an established school bus route involving 44 buses per weekday. The average annual daily vehicle traffic is expected to increase to 27,640 by 2020. The posted speed limit is 35 miles per hour.
- 7 The current crossing has a single active main line track. BNSF Railway Company (BNSF Railway) and Tacoma Rail currently operate two freight trains over the crossing four or five days per week. Current speed limit for the trains is 10 miles per hour. No passenger trains operate at the crossing at this time. Train traffic and train speeds are expected to increase substantially in the future. Freight trains operated by BNSF Railway and Tacoma Rail will continue at two per day but train speeds will increase to 40 mph. Sound Transit and Amtrak will initiate passenger service over this crossing upon completion of the project. Average daily passenger train traffic is expected to be 24 per day. Some passenger trains will operate at the authorized speed of 79 mph and others will operate at lower speeds.
- 8 WSDOT proposes to add a second track, 15 feet east of the existing track. Only one track will be in service for the near term. The second track will be a stub, constructed at the same time in order to avoid multiple construction disruption to the community. The ends of the stub will be connected with through tracks at a later date. At that time, there will be two active main lines on approximately 15 foot track centers at this location.
- 9 Current warning devices at the crossing include cross-bucks and cantilever-mounted flashing lights and gates on each approach. The lights are interconnected with the traffic

signal at the intersection of Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest and Lakeview Avenue. The existing train detection circuitry is motion sensors.

- 10 The addition of a second track and future proposed use of this crossing presents a number of significant challenges. In order to address public safety concerns and other issues, WSDOT and Sound Transit organized a diagnostic team consisting of representatives of all major stakeholder groups. The diagnostic team met on-site in September 2006, and provided valuable input and specific recommendations to WSDOT, Sound Transit and the contracted design engineers. The resulting construction design is consistent in all major components to the recommendations of the diagnostic team.
- 11 Modifications to the existing warning devices include relocating the existing eastside cantilever and gate assembly approximately 15 feet eastward to accommodate construction of the new second main line. The cantilever and gate assembly on the west side of the tracks will remain in place.
- 12 The control equipment for the railroad warning devices will be upgraded to modern constant warning time units, including replacing the existing bungalow and hardware. The new circuitry will allow additional advanced preemption time. The interconnection between the rail crossing and traffic signals will be upgraded to a six-wire supervisory configuration. An active blank-out sign is proposed to control right turns by northbound traffic on Lakeview Avenue Southwest at the intersection of Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest and Lakeview Avenue during preemption.
- 13 A median will be installed on the east side of the crossing and C-curb on the west side to discourage driving around the gates and other illegal or risky motorist behavior.
- 14 Sidewalks on both sides of the crossing will be improved to provide safe pedestrian travel over the crossing.
- 15 The proposed upgrades are in the interest of improving passenger train service in Washington and providing for the safety and convenience of roadway users.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 16 (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.*

- 17 (2) The proposed modifications of this crossing involve a public railroad-highway grade crossing, as defined in RCW 81.53.010.
- 18 (3) RCW 81.53.261 requires that the Commission grant approval prior to modifying a public railroad-highway grade crossing within the state of Washington.
- 19 (4) Commission Staff investigated the petition and recommends that it be granted with the conditions identified below.
- 20 (5) After examination of the petition filed by the Washington State Department of Transportation on July 2, 2008, and giving consideration to all relevant matters and for good cause shown, the Commission grants the petition.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

- 21 The petition of the Washington State Department of Transportation to modify a railroad-highway grade crossing at the intersection of Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest and Sound Transit's tracks in the city of Lakewood is granted, as follows:
- (1) The modifications must substantially conform to those described in the petition and detailed in the design drawings. Due to the complexity of this project, design changes are inevitable. Petitioner is authorized to make minor changes as necessary for successful completion of the project on the condition that Commission Staff is consulted on safety-related changes.
 - (2) Traffic control devices must comply with all applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.
 - (3) Traffic control devices and instrument housing must be installed in such a manner as to provide required clearances from both the roadway and railroad tracks.
 - (4) Petitioner must notify Commission Staff within 30 days upon completion of this modification project.

(5) TR-081229 Order 01 supersedes Order 01 in Docket TR-061195.

The Commissioners have delegated authority to the Secretary to enter this Order pursuant to RCW 80.01.030 and WAC 480-07-904((1)(b)).

DATED at Olympia, Washington, and effective September 24, 2008.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DAVID W. DANNER, Executive Director and Secretary

NOTICE: This is an order delegated to the Secretary for decision. In addition to serving you a copy of the decision, the Commission will post on its Internet Web site for at least fourteen (14) days a listing of all matters delegated to the Secretary for decision. You may seek Commission review of this decision. You must file a request for Commission review of this order no later than fourteen (14) days after the date the decision is posted on the Commission's Web site. The Commission will schedule your request for review for consideration at a regularly scheduled open meeting. The Commission will notify you of the time and place of the open meeting at which the Commission will review the order.

The Commission will grant a late-filed request for review only on a showing of good cause, including a satisfactory explanation of why the person did not timely file the request. A form for late-filed requests is available on the Commission's Web site.

This notice and review process is pursuant to the provisions of RCW 80.01.030 and WAC 480-07-904(2) and (3).