

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

WASHINGTON STATE	)	DOCKET TR-081231
DEPARTMENT OF	)	
TRANSPORTATION,	)	ORDER 01
	)	
Petitioner.	)	ORDER GRANTING PETITION,
	)	WITH CONDITIONS, TO MODIFY A
	)	PUBLIC HIGHWAY-RAIL GRADE
	)	CROSSING AT BRIDGEPORT WAY
Central Puget Sound Regional	)	SW
Transportation Authority (Sound	)	
Transit), City of Lakewood and	)	
Tacoma Rail	)	USDOT: 085821P
	)	UTC: 43B.60
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 Bridgeport Way 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-081229, Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest; TR-081230, 108<sup>th</sup> Street Southwest; and TR-081232, 100<sup>th</sup> 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-061198 for approval to make various modifications to the Bridgeport Way Southwest crossing. The Commission approved Sound Transit's petition on September 22, 2006. The proposed modifications approved in docket number TR-061198 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 Bridgeport Way Southwest is an arterial with four lanes of travel; two northbound and two southbound. There is also an existing median on the south side of the crossing but the median ends 50 feet short of the tracks. WSDOT reports average annual daily vehicle traffic over the crossing at 23,330 in 2006, with 2.9 percent of the traffic involving commercial motor vehicles at the afternoon peak. The crossing is part of an established school bus route involving 239 buses per weekday. The average annual daily vehicle traffic is expected to increase to 35,010 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 12 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 remove the existing tracks and construct two new tracks. One of the new tracks will be constructed approximately eight feet to the left of the existing track and the other, eight feet to the right of the existing tracks. There will be two active main lines on approximately 15 foot track centers at this new location.
- 9 Current warning devices at the crossing include cross-bucks and cantilever-mounted flashing lights on each approach. The lights are interconnected with the traffic signal at

the intersection of Bridgeport Way Southwest and Pacific Avenue. The existing train detection circuitry is relay track circuit.

- 10 The realignment and reconstruction of new tracks 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 installation of new cantilever mounted flashing lights and gates on both approaches.
- 12 The control equipment for the railroad warning devices will be upgraded to modern constant warning time units, including replacing the existing relay circuit. 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.
- 13 The existing median on the south side of the crossing will be extended northward to reach closer to the tracks. New medians will be installed on the north side of the crossing 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 A pre-signal is proposed for the southbound approach along Bridgeport Way Southwest. The pre-signal will be timed with the traffic signal at the intersection of Bridgeport Way Southwest and Pacific Avenue, so that the pre-signal turns red just prior to the traffic signal at Pacific Highway. Timing of the pre-signal will discourage queue formation on the tracks.
- 16 WSDOT also proposes to install wayside horns as a one-for-one substitution of the traditional train horn. With higher speed train operations, the train horn would begin sounding farther from the crossing, near residential areas and schools. The installation of wayside horns will confine the sound near the crossing and minimize noise in areas

where an audible warning is not needed for safety purposes. Horns are proposed to be installed in the northeast and southwest quadrants. Indicator lights are proposed to be installed on top of the cantilever masts high enough so that train engineers can see them from a distance.

- 17 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

- 18 (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.*
- 19 (2) The proposed modifications of this crossing involve a public railroad-highway grade crossing, as defined in RCW 81.53.010.
- 20 (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.
- 21 (4) Commission Staff investigated the petition and recommends that it be granted with the conditions identified below.
- 22 (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:

- 23 The petition of the Washington State Department of Transportation to modify a railroad-highway grade crossing at the intersection of Bridgeport Way 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) The installation of wayside horns is approved in concept. Actual placement of the horns and indicator lights are subject to approval of a diagnostic team which includes, at a minimum, Commission Staff, Sound Transit, WSDOT, the wayside horn vendor, and the City of Lakewood.
- (5) Petitioner must notify Commission Staff within 30 days upon completion of this modification project.
- (6) TR-081231 Order 01 supersedes Order 01 in Docket TR-061198.

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).