



STATE OF WASHINGTON

UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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May 17, 2016

Joseph P. Rutan, P.E.
County Engineer/Assistant Director
Whatcom County Public Works Dept.
322 N. Commercial Street, Suite 301
Bellingham, WA 98225-4042

Re: TR-160319 – Notice of Intent to Establish a Railroad Quiet Zone at Yacht Club Road, DOT #084796F

Dear Mr. Rutan:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Whatcom County's proposed quiet zone, as described in Docket TR-160319.

On March 11, 2016, Whatcom County notified the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (commission) of its intent to establish a railroad quiet zone at Yacht Club Road.

On February 3, 2016, Bob Boston, commission railroad safety staff, participated in an on-site quiet zone review of the Yacht Club Road crossing along with representatives from Whatcom County Public Works and BNSF Railway Co. (BNSF). The city is proposing a 24-hour, seven day per week quiet zone.

This crossing has one main line track and is currently equipped with the minimum requirements per Code of Federal Regulations Part 222 of gates and flashing lights. In addition the Yacht Club Road crossing has a pedestrian bell and power out indicators. The County proposes to install mountable medians with three-foot high reflectorized channelization devices on both approaches to the crossing. The median on the east side of the crossing is proposed to be 60 feet in length and would qualify as a supplemental safety measure (SSM). The median on the west side of the crossing is proposed to be 35 feet in length and would qualify as an alternative safety measure (ASM). The medians at this crossing will therefore be considered ASM improvements and require an application to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The ASM spreadsheet will also need to be applied to the FRA quiet zone calculator in order to determine the correct quiet zone risk index when submitting the application to the FRA.

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The team at the February 3, crossing review agreed that the preferred treatment would be adding an exit gate for eastbound traffic and installing non-traversable medians on both approaches. It is commission's staff opinion that non-traversable medians provide a much higher disincentive for motorists to drive over them because of the potential damage to vehicles. In addition, the short 35 foot median allows for easy drive around and the absence of an exit gate increases the chance of collision. Sight distance for motorists approaching the west side of the crossing is also limited due to steep grade and angle.

Commission staff reviewed the FRA crossing inventory data on file and updated the vehicle traffic ADT to 222 per the latest Whatcom County traffic study. During the on-site meeting it was discussed that the crossing is equipped with constant warning train detection, but the current crossing inventory shows "DC" type train detection. The County should contact BNSF to verify the type of train detection and request that they update the FRA crossing inventory. If train detection is "DC" it will need to be upgraded prior to implementing a quiet zone at this crossing.

As you know, the commission may comment on quiet zone proposals, but may not approve or disapprove the proposal because states have been preempted in this area by federal rule. Based on staff's participation and observations at the crossing review, commission staff offers these comments.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Please feel free to contact Bob Boston at 360-701-1615 or by email bboston@utc.wa.gov, if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Steven W. King
Executive Director and Secretary

cc: John Shurson and Richard Wagner, BNSF Railway Co.
Cody Swan, Whatcom County Public Works
FRA Associate Administrator for Safety
Christine Adams, FRA Crossing and Trespass Manager
Kurt Laird, Amtrak
Ahmer Nizam, Washington State Department of Transportation