

Agenda Date: April 24, 2014  
Item Number: B1

**Docket:** TR-140424  
Company: BNSF Railway Co.

Staff: Bob Boston, Rail Safety Program Specialist  
Kathy Hunter, Rail Safety Manager

### **Recommendation**

Issue an order approving BNSF Railway Co.'s (BNSF) petition for an overhead clearance waiver at the re-spray facility proposed to be built on BNSF property at Pasco, WA.

### **Background**

On March 17, 2014, Zachry Engineering Corporation (Zachry), on behalf of BNSF, filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (commission) a petition requesting exemption from WAC 480-60-040, which requires railroad companies to maintain an overhead clearance of at least 22 feet 6 inches from the top of the rail to the nearest structure.

BNSF's petition relates to the construction of a coal train re-spray facility located on a main line within the Pasco rail yard at milepost 142.36. The re-spray equipment will be housed in a facility with a roof and side walls. The purpose of this facility is to provide a spray coating of dust abatement solution to the top surface of coal which is transported on westbound trains. The re-spray facility contains the spray bars and spray bar lift equipment. When the spray bars begin to function they move from a stored position of 24 feet to an operational position of 16 feet 6 inches from top of rail and require a permanent exemption from the overhead clearance rules.

On April 1, 2014, Sierra Club, Dogwood Initiative, Climate Solutions and Washington Environmental Council (Sierra Club) filed comments in response to BNSF's overhead clearance waiver petition. Sierra Club requests that the petition be considered at the April 24, 2014, open meeting to allow additional time for input. In addition, Sierra Club raises these questions:

- What chemicals might the surfactants contain
- How will neighbors next to the tracks be impacted
- How much water will the re-spray station utilize
- What hours will it operate
- Will the re-spray station cause significant noise or aesthetic issues given its height and location
- Have similar re-spray stations ever been tested or utilized before
- How might SEPA apply to this decision
- What other permits will BNSF need to obtain in order to build this re-spray station
- Where is the coal sprayed by these trains going
- If some of the coal is traveling to British Columbia for export, how effective will these surfactants be by the time they reach these B.C. communities

## **Discussion**

Coal trains approaching the re-spray facility will be identified for treatment by a transponder reader. The system is designed to ignore other trains passing through the facility and the spray bars will not be lowered below the clearance envelope. Trackside signals for approaching train crews will indicate a fail safe “UP” position or will show “STOP” if the spray bars are not in the “UP” position. Redundant “load too high” photo eye sensors will also cause emergency retract of the spray bars in the event a railroad vehicle greater than 16 feet high is detected inbound.

As coal trains approach the re-spray facility, train crews will view an information signal stand indicating the re-spray system is “OK” for service and the system is armed and ready to operate. The train crew will then set the locomotive “pacesetter” train speed to 10 mph for constant speed. The spray bars will automatically be lowered into operating position after the lead locomotives have passed and will spray only the coal and not the spaces between the cars. In the event of power failure, counterweights on the spray bar headers will retract the spray bars to the fail safe “UP” position.

In the event the crew of an approaching train not requiring spray treatment sees a signal that the system is “ARMED,” Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) can disarm the system by depressing the “Demand Disarm” push button on their console. This would occur only if there is a transponder reader failure.

Although train crewmembers have no reason to ride on the top of a rail car, all parties agree that any clearance exemption should be conditional upon a prohibition against riding on the top of a rail car approaching the re-spray facility; and clearly marking and signing the re-spray facility as having lower vertical clearance.

## **Conclusion**

Staff finds that the proposed construction of the facility has sufficient safety features including redundant fail safe technology to protect worker safety. The commission should issue an order approving the exemption from WAC 480-60-040 relating to overhead clearances.