

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

In the Matter of the Petition of	DOCKET TR-250735
CITY OF RICHLAND,	
Petitioner,	ORDER 01
PORT OF BENTON, CITY OF KENNEWICK, CWW LLC, UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD, BNSF RAILWAY CO.,	GRANTING PETITION TO MODIFY WARNING DEVICES AT A PUBLIC HIGHWAY-RAIL GRADE CROSSING AT STEPTOE STREET, RICHLAND
Respondents.	USDOT: 310397T

BACKGROUND

- 1 On October 1, 2025, the City of Richland (City or Petitioner) filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) a petition (Petition) seeking approval to modify warning devices at the intersection of a highway-rail grade crossing at Steptoe Street and the White Bluffs Rail Spur tracks owned by the Port of Benton and operated by CWW LLC (Columbia Rail) in Richland, identified as USDOT 310397T. The intersection is located jointly in the cities of Kennewick and Richland.
- 2 Respondents, the Port of Benton, the City of Kennewick, Columbia Rail, Union Pacific Railroad, and BNSF Railway Co. consented to entry of a Commission order without hearing.
- 3 Steptoe Street is a five-lane principal arterial roadway with a posted vehicle speed limit of 35 miles per hour. The average annual daily traffic at this location is estimated at 23,183 vehicles. Steptoe Street is part of an established truck route with approximately two percent daily commercial vehicle traffic and is part of an established school bus route with eight school buses using the crossing on school days. The City anticipates one percent growth in vehicle traffic within the next 10 years. An average of four to six freight trains operate over the crossing daily at 10 miles per hour. No passenger trains operate over the crossing. Rail traffic is expected to grow by three percent annually over the next 10 years.
- 4 Warning devices at the crossing consist of advance warning signs, pavement markings, reflectorized cross bucks, Emergency Notification System signs, cantilever-mounted flashing warning lights, gates, and bells.

- 5 In its Petition, the City states that the crossing will be reconstructed to a four-legged roadway intersection at Steptoe Street and Tapteal Drive with the railroad tracks running diagonally through the intersection. Cantilevers will be removed and new advance warning signs, pavement markings, cross bucks, concrete crossing panels, and ties will be installed. Raised concrete medians, measuring between 100 to 400 feet in length, will be installed on all four crossing approaches. Right turns from Tapteal Drive to Steptoe Street will be separated from the crossing by a raised concrete “pork chop” island. Pedestrian walkways will be oriented to cross the tracks at a 90-degree angle and detectable warning surfaces will be added. Bicycles will be diverted from the roadway to the sidewalk at the crossing so that they also cross at a 90-degree angle. The City will maintain the sidewalks.
- 6 Mast-mounted flashing light signals and gates will be installed on the shoulder and on center island medians at Steptoe Street, two on the north side and two on the south side. New mast-mounted flashing light signals and gates will also be installed on the east and west Tapteal Drive approaches. Mast-mounted pedestrian flashing light signals will be installed, including two at the southeast pedestrian crossing and two at the northwest pedestrian crossing. All flashing light signals will be interconnected with nearby traffic signals and provide the verified preemption time as described in the Petition attachment.
- 7 In describing the public safety need for the crossing modifications, the City states that the existing intersection of Tapteal Drive and Steptoe Street is a T-intersection 170 feet north of the tracks. The intersection operates at low level of service, including up to 55 seconds of average vehicle delay. There have been 35 crashes over the past five years, including five injury crashes and one fatality. With future growth along Tapteal Drive, the intersection will experience further level-of-service delays. With development planned on the property east of Steptoe Street, an access point is required south of the tracks, including another possible T-intersection. The proposed improvements to the crossing eliminate the need for two T-intersections.
- 8 The City states that the project will allow a single intersection to operate as efficiently and safely as possible with no detrimental safety effects to the current operation of the railroad crossing. The proposed design has gates with medians on all four approaches to discourage vehicle traffic from driving around the gates. Because the railroad goes through the middle of the intersection, it eliminates the potential of any vehicle traffic queuing across the railroad tracks.
- 9 According to the Petition, the parties have reached an agreement related to the apportionment of costs for the upgrades.

- 10 Staff has investigated the Petition and recommends that it be granted subject to the following conditions: (1) the modifications must conform to those described in the Petition, (2) traffic control devices must comply with all applicable standards specified in the USDOT Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, (3) the City must complete the proposed modifications within five years, (4) the City must notify the Commission within 60 days upon completion of the modifications authorized herein, and (5) acceptance of the changes is subject to inspection by Staff, who will verify that the crossing is in full compliance with the conditions specified herein.

DISCUSSION

- 11 Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 81.53.261 requires that the Commission grant approval prior to modifying a public railroad-highway grade crossing within the state of Washington. We find that the proposed modification will improve overall safety for crossing users. When the Commission directs the installation of warning devices, it will apportion installation and maintenance costs in accordance with the applicable statutes.¹ RCW 81.53.261 provides that the parties may enter into an agreement providing for the installation of signals or other warning devices or for the apportionment of the cost of installation and maintenance. The parties to this Petition confirmed that they have reached an agreement related to cost apportionment. Accordingly, the Commission grants the Petition subject to the conditions that Staff recommends.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 12 (1) The Commission is an agency of the state of Washington having jurisdiction over public railroad-highway grade crossings within the state of Washington.
- 13 (2) The Steptoe Street grade crossing, identified as USDOT 310397T, is a public highway-rail grade crossing within the state of Washington.
- 14 (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. See also Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 480-62-150.
- 15 (4) Staff investigated the Petition and recommends that it be granted with the conditions set out in paragraph 10 above.

¹ See RCW 81.53.261–.295.

- 16 (5) After examining the Petition filed by the City of Richland on October 1, 2025, and considering all relevant matters and for good cause shown, the Commission grants the Petition.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

- 17 The City of Richland's Petition to modify warning devices at a highway-rail grade crossing located at Steptoe Street is granted, subject to the following conditions:
- (1) The modifications must conform to those described in and attached to the Petition.
 - (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) The City of Richland must complete the proposed modifications within five years.
 - (4) The City of Richland must notify the Commission within 60 days upon completion of the modifications authorized herein.
 - (5) Acceptance of the changes is subject to inspection by Staff, who will verify that the crossing is in full compliance with the conditions specified herein.
- 18 The Secretary of the Commission has delegated authority over this matter pursuant to Order 01 in Docket A-180762. The Secretary finds this Order to be consistent with the public interest.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective October 9, 2025.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

/s/ Jeff Killip
Executive Director and Secretary
By: /s/ Evan Gaffey
Operations Director
Executive Director's Designee

NOTICE TO PARTIES: This is an order delegated to the Executive Secretary for decision. As authorized in WAC 480-07-904(3), you must file any request for Commission review of this order no later than 14 days after the date the decision is posted on the Commission's website.