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CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Mayor

# City of **Mount Vernon**

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May 10, 2007

Carole Washburn, Executive Secretary  
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission  
1300 South Evergreen Park Drive SW  
PO Box 47250, Olympia, WA 98504-7250

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RECORDS MANAGEMENT UNIT  
07 MAY 14 AM 8:10  
STATE OF WASHINGTON  
UTIL. AND TRANSP.  
COMMISSION

**RE: Reference No. TR-070696  
BNSF Railway Petition to Close Hickox Road Highway-Rail Grade Crossing**

Dear Ms. Washburn:

The purpose of this letter is to assure that the WUTC receives our comments in opposition to the proposed closure of the rail crossing at Hickox Road in South Mount Vernon. During the past year we have reviewed the report materials analyzing this proposal and provided our comments opposing the closure to the WUTC and the rail operations office of WSDOT. These comments are reiterated as follows:

- Hickox Road offers important safety and economic benefits to the residents and businesses in the area. Residential access to fire and emergency medical services would be detrimentally impacted by the proposed closure. While we desire improved passenger and freight rail service, absent effective mitigation of these concerns, we oppose this closure.
- In addition, closure of the crossing precludes expansion of Hickox in the future. A current WSDOT operational analysis of I-5 is examining at what point a full interchange at Hickox Road might make operational sense. Closure would add to the public cost of such a future improvement by preventing the need for the BN Railroad to participate financially, and it would reduce the benefit of the interchange to transportation by blocking westerly access.
- The importance of the rail crossing will continue to increase with growth pressure. For example, the City of Mount Vernon has analyzed the buildable lands in its urban growth area (UGA) and identified an important need for an additional 800 acres of commercial land during the next twenty years. There are only two feasible regions to locate this added commercial land—in the river bend area and/or in South Mount Vernon. Additional commercial land in South Mount Vernon would greatly increase the need for the rail crossing to remain open at Hickox Road.

- Lastly, the importance of the Hickox rail crossing, especially to the City, is made greater by the fact that there are no other public rail crossings in the City's UGA south of Blackburn Road—a distance of approximately one and a half miles.

For the above reasons, the proposed closure would (1) reduce access across the railroad for traffic, emergency vehicles and school buses in South Mount Vernon, (2) limit traffic options for the existing transportation grid, and (3) reduce the ease with which Mount Vernon can attract needed commercial development.

We believe that roads such as Hickox are crucial to the regions they serve. Without a complete review of alternatives such as moving the proposed siding, waiving blockage limitations, or installing better gating systems and demonstrating that none of these are workable, we ask that any application for closure of this facility be summarily dismissed.

Even if the rail siding must be extended across Hickox Road, we would advocate an improved crossing facility that allows the side track improvement with appropriate safe guards while keeping the Hickox Road crossing open.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bud Norris', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bud Norris  
Mayor