Washington State Department of Transportation
Douglas B. MacDonald
Secretary of Transportation

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October 15, 2007

TO: All Interested Parties

FROM: Elizabeth Phinney, Rail Environmental Manager

SUBJECT: **Mount Vernon Siding Extension**
Withdrawal of SEPA DNS and Re-issuance of SEPA DNS

WSDOT is withdrawing the Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS) for the Mount Vernon Siding Extension that was issued on February 16, 2007. A DNS for the same project is being re-issued on October 15, 2007, with comments due on **October 30, 2007.**

This action is being taken in consideration of the comments received from local agencies. Minor changes have been made to the SEPA Environmental Checklist.

A copy of the SEPA documentation is included with this memo.

No action will be taken for 15 days after issuance.

WITHDRAWN
DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE
Mount Vernon Siding Extension Project
Ecology SEPA No. 07-1267

AND

RE-ISSUED
DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE

This DNS is being re-issued to ensure that adequate public notice is given to the public and to local agencies.

Description of proposal:

The proposed **Mount Vernon Siding Extension Project** will extend the existing 6,000-foot BNSF Railway siding in Mount Vernon an additional 3,700 feet to the south.

The total siding length of 9,700 feet will allow long freight trains to pull off the main line track and permit faster passenger trains and other faster freight trains to pass. The existing siding is located on the east side of the main line track.

As part of the extension project, the public at-grade railroad street crossing at Hickox Road is anticipated to be closed.

Proponent:

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

Location of proposal, including street address, if any:

The project site is located on the BNSF main line railroad tracks at the southwestern limits of Mount Vernon and into Skagit County, between Railroad Mileposts 66.07 and 76.08, Bellingham Subdivision of the Northwest Division of BNSF. The project site is located in Section 31, township 34 N, range 4 W; and section 6; township 33 N; range 4 W.

Lead agency:

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

For engineering questions, please contact:
Kevin Jeffers, P.E., Rail Projects Engineer
WSDOT State Rail Office
PO Box 47407
Olympia WA 98504-7407
360-705-7982; jefferk@wsdot.wa.gov

For environmental questions, please contact:
Elizabeth Phinney, Rail Environmental Manager
WSDOT State Rail Office
PO Box 47407
Olympia WA 98504-7407
360-705-7902; phinnee@wsdot.wa.gov

The lead agency for this proposal has determined that it does not have a probable significant adverse impact on the environment. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c). This decision was made after review of a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the lead agency. This information is available to the public on request.

This DNS is issued under WAC 197-11-340(2); the lead agency will not act on this proposal for 14 days from the date below.

Comments must be submitted by **October 30, 2007.**

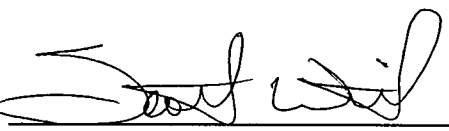
Please send comments to:
Elizabeth Phinney
WSDOT Rail Office
PO Box 47407
Olympia WA 98504-7387
phinnee@wsdot.wa.gov
fax: 360-705-6821

Responsible official : Scott Witt

Position/title: State Rail and Marine Director

Phone: 360-705-6903

Address: PO Box 47407
Olympia WA 98504-7407

Date: 15 October 2007 **Signature:** 

SEPA
ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

(UPDATED)

THE BNSF RAILWAY
MOUNT VERNON SIDING EXTENSION PROJECT

Prepared by:

Washington State Department of Transportation

February 2007; updated October 2007

SEPA
ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

A. BACKGROUND

1. Name of proposed project, if applicable:

Mount Vernon Siding Extension Project

2. Name of applicant:

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

3. Address and phone number of applicant and contact person:

Applicant	**Contact**
Washington State Department of Transportation Rail Office 310 Maple Park Avenue SE PO Box 47407 Olympia WA 98504-7407	Kevin Jeffers, P.E. 360-705-7982 or Elizabeth Phinney 360-705-7902

4. Date checklist prepared:

February 2007; updated October 2007

5. Agency requesting checklist:

Washington State Department of Transportation

6. Proposed timing or schedule (including phasing, if applicable):

Construction is anticipated to begin in February 2008 and will be completed by December 31, 2008.

7. Do you have any plans for future additions, expansion, or further activity related to or connected with this proposal? If yes, explain.

No.

8. List any environmental information you know about that has been prepared, or will be prepared, directly related to this proposal.

Wetland Report (prepared by WSDOT)
Wetland Mitigation Report (prepared by WSDOT)

Biological Assessment (prepared by WSDOT)
Site Reconnaissance (prepared by Farallon Consulting)
Cultural Resources Survey (prepared by Jones & Stokes)
Hickox Road Railway Crossing Closure Impact Analysis, Mount Vernon, Washington, January 2007 (prepared by Garry Struthers Associates)

9. **Do you know whether applications are pending for governmental approvals of other proposals directly affecting the property covered by your proposal? If yes, explain.**

No.

10. **List any government approvals or permits that will be needed for your proposal, if known.**

Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit 23
401 Water Quality Certification
Coastal Zone Consistency Determination
Section 106 compliance

11. **Give brief, complete description of your proposal, including the proposed uses and the site of the project. There are several questions later in this checklist that ask you to describe certain aspects of your proposal. You do not need to repeat those answers on this page.**

The proposed project will extend the existing 6,000-foot BNSF Railway siding in Mount Vernon approximately 3,700 feet.

The total siding capacity of approximately 9,700 feet will allow long freight trains to pull off the main line track and permit faster passenger trains and other faster freight trains to pass. The existing siding is located on the east side of the main line track.

As part of the extension project, the public at-grade railroad street crossing at Hickox Road is anticipated to be closed.

12. **Location of the proposal. Give sufficient information for a person to understand the precise location of your proposed project, including a street address, if any, and section, township, and range, if known. If a proposal would occur over a range of area, provide the range or boundaries of the site(s). Provide a legal description, site plan, vicinity map, and topographic map, if reasonably available. While you should submit any plans required by the agency, you are not required to duplicate maps or detailed plans submitted with any permit applications related to this checklist.**

The project site is located on the BNSF main line railroad tracks at the southwestern limits of Mount Vernon and into Skagit County, between Railroad Mileposts 66.07 and 76.08, Bellingham Subdivision of the Northwest Division of BNSF. (Please see attached vicinity map.) The project site is located in Section 31, township 34 N, range 4 W; and section 6; township 33 N; range 4 W.

B. ENVIRONMENTAL ELEMENTS

1. Earth

a. General description of the site (circle one): Flat, rolling, hilly, steep slopes, mountainous, other:

The existing rail bed is standard railroad right-of-way. The tracks are placed on level fill above a standard railroad embankment. The surrounding land is agricultural (Skagit County) and a limited amount of light industrial land (Mount Vernon).

b. What is the steepest slope on the site (approximate percent slope)?

The existing railroad bed is elevated 8 feet above the bottom of the railside ditch, with 2H:1V sloping sides (50% slope).

c. What general types of soils are found on the site (for example, clay, sand, gravel, peat, muck)? If you know the classification of agricultural soils, specify them and note any prime farmland.

Sumas Silt Loam is the only soil series present within the project footprint.

d. Are there surface indications or history of unstable soils in the immediate vicinity? If so, describe.

No.

e. Describe the purpose, type, and approximate quantities of any filling or grading proposed. Indicate source of fill.

Fill is needed to construct the 8-foot high railroad support structure. The width of the fill will be 40 feet for 3,050 feet and 70 feet for 650 feet. The extra width at the southern end of the siding extension is so that the turnout (switch) can be constructed in one piece prior to its move into the railroad main line. It is anticipated that there will be approximately 720 cubic yards of excavation of structurally unsuitable soil and 23,315 cubic yards of clean structural fill and ballast used for the construction of the siding extension. The fill material will come from an approved commercial quarry.

f. Could erosion occur as a result of clearing, construction, or use? If so, generally describe.

Soil erosion is not probable on the site because of the nature of the construction practices involving compacted stabilized material. Construction Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be used appropriately to prevent any construction-related erosion. The finished project has been designed to preclude erosion.

g. About what percent of the site will be covered with impervious surfaces after project construction (for example, asphalt or buildings)?

The only impervious surface will be the rail, ties, and signal bungalow. The ties are spaced at 16 to 23 inches apart with pervious crushed rock ballast between rails. The ballast is designed so any precipitation striking the rail or ties infiltrates into the ballast and the subballast. The signal bungalow is an 8 x 8 foot structure. The percent of impervious surface is minimal, and there will be no stormwater runoff from the completed project.

h. Proposed measures to reduce or control erosion, or other impacts to the earth, if any.

Construction Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be designed and implemented according to the most recent version of the Stormwater Management Manual for Puget Sound. The BMPs used will be those most appropriate for the project site, and could include such items as construction entrances, filter fabric fences, sediment ponds or basins, check dams, filter berms, and permanent seeding.

2. Air

a. What types of emissions to the air would result from the proposal (i.e., dust, automobile odors, industrial wood smoke) during construction and when the project is completed? If any, generally describe and give approximate quantities if known.

Some dust could be generated during construction. Heavy equipment will emit exhaust during construction. Following completion of the project, emissions from the site will be limited to diesel train exhaust passing the site, which is pre-existing to the project.

b. Are there any off-site sources of emissions or odor that may affect your proposal? If so, generally describe.

No.

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control emissions or other impacts to air, if any.

Dust will be controlled, as needed, using water.

3. Water

a. Surface:

1) Is there any surface water body on or in the immediate vicinity of the site (including year-round and seasonal streams, saltwater, lakes, ponds, wetlands)? If yes, describe type and provide names. If appropriate, state what stream or river if flows into.

There were six wetlands identified within the project action area. Five of these wetlands were located along the railroad berm toe of slope, with two of these areas extending out into privately-owned agricultural fields. These wetlands are considered of low quality and were rated as Category 3 and 4.

2) Will the project require any work over, in, or adjacent to (within 200 feet) the described waters? If yes, please describe and attach available plans.

Yes, 0.75 acres of Category 3 and 4 wetlands will be filled as a result of this project. These wetlands occur primarily in the railroad ditch at the toe of the railroad support structure. Mitigation for the impacted wetlands will be at a mitigation site on Gages Slough. This site will be shared with the SR 20, I-5 to Freedonia highway project. (Details are contained in the attached Mount Vernon Wetland Biology Report, updated February 2007, again updated June 2007, and the Mount Vernon Wetland Mitigation Report, February 2007, updated June 12, 2007.) (Please note that this project is utilizing the Multi-Agency Permitting Team to facilitate permitting.)

3) Estimate the amount of fill and dredge material that would be placed in or removed from surface water or wetlands and indicate the area of the site that would be affected. Indicate the source of fill material.

The material to be removed from the wetlands is 720 cubic yards of structurally unsuitable soil. A total of 23,315 cubic yards of structural fill will be used to create a railroad support structure 8 feet high and 40 feet wide for 3,050 feet, and 8 feet high and 70 feet wide for an additional 650 feet (at the southern end – to support the construction of a rail turnout (switch). Fill material will come from an approved commercial quarry.

4) Will the proposal require surface water withdrawals or diversions? Give general description, purpose, and approximate quantities if known.

No surface water withdrawals or diversions will be required.

5) Does the proposal lie within a 100-year floodplain? If so, note location on the site plan.

The historic floodplain in this location lies behind a dike.

6) Does the proposal involve any discharges of waste materials to surface waters? If so, describe the type of waste and anticipated volume of discharge.

No waste will be discharged to surface waters. Best Management Practices will be employed, which will prevent construction erosion and sedimentation.

b. Ground:

1) Will ground water be withdrawn, or will water be discharged to ground water? Give general description, purpose, and approximate quantities, if known.

No ground water will be withdrawn, nor will water be discharged to the groundwater.

2) Describe waste material that will be charged into the ground from septic tanks or other sources, if any (for example: Domestic sewage, industrial, containing the following chemicals; agricultural; etc.) Describe the general size of the system, the number of such systems, the number of houses to be served (if applicable), or the number of animals or humans the system(s) are expected to serve.

There will be no waste discharged to ground water.

c. Water Runoff (including storm water):

1) Describe the source of runoff (including storm water) and method of collection and disposal, if any (including quantities, if known). Where will this water flow? Will this water flow into other waters? If so, describe.

The only source of runoff will be precipitation in the form of rain and/or snowmelt. During construction, to prevent sediments from traveling beyond the construction zone, a series of Best Management Practices have been designated for the site. These best management practices include such items as construction entrances, filter fabric fences, sediment ponds or basins, check dams, filter berms, and permanent seeding. No runoff will be allowed to flow off the construction site until the quality of the discharge is at or below acceptable water quality limits.

2) Could waste materials endanger ground or surface waters? If so, generally describe.

No. Best Management Practices for erosion control will be applied for handling any possible waste materials.

d. Proposed measures to reduce or control surface, ground, or runoff water impacts, if any:

Best Management Practices will be used during construction, and seeding, fertilizing and mulching of disturbed slopes after construction will be performed to reduce and eliminate surface water runoff impacts.

4. Plants

a. Check or circle types of vegetation found on the site:

X shrubs
X grasses
X blackberries
X trees

b. What kind and amount of vegetation will be removed or altered?

All the vegetation in the area to be filled will be removed. Seeding, fertilizing and mulching of exposed soils will be done when the proposed project is completed.

c. List threatened or endangered species known to be on or near the site.

None.

d. Proposed landscaping, use of native plants, or other measures to preserve or enhance vegetation on the site, if any:

Seeding, fertilizing and mulching will be done to cover disturbed slopes.

5. Animals

a. Circle any birds and animals that have been observed on or near the site or are known to be on or near the site:

X songbirds
X mice

b. List any threatened or endangered species known to be on or near the site.

None.

c. Is the site part of a migration route? If so, explain.

No.

d. Proposed measures to preserve or enhance wildlife, if any:

No impacts are anticipated; thus no measures are proposed.

6. Energy and Natural Resources

a. What kinds of energy (electric, natural gas, oil, wood stove, solar) will be used to meet the completed project's energy needs? Describe whether it will be used for heating, manufacturing, etc.

During construction, the contractor will be using diesel-fueled construction equipment. Diesel fuel will also be used by the trains on the tracks. A minor amount of electricity will be used to operate the signals and switches. The use of electricity should be similar to current conditions, with the possibility that it could increase slightly as rail traffic on the tracks increase.

b. Would your project affect the potential use of solar energy by adjacent properties? If so, generally describe.

No.

c. What kinds of energy conservation features are included in the plans of this proposal? List other proposed measures to reduce or control energy impacts, if any:

Does not apply.

7. Environmental Health

a. Are there any environmental health hazards, including exposure to toxic chemicals, risk of fire and explosion, spill, or hazardous waste, that could occur as a result of this proposal? If so, describe.

No environmental health hazards are anticipated as a result of project construction. Continued railroad operations will be consistent with applicable rules and regulations.

1) Describe special emergency services that might be required.

WSDOT/BNSF do not anticipate that special emergency services will be required. Following construction, BNSF is equipped to respond to derailments or accidents. During railway operations, BNSF personnel will be required to comply with BNSF's health and safety plan.

2) Proposed measures to reduce or control environmental health hazards, if any:

During construction, the contractor will be required to follow the applicable Washington Industrial Safety and Health Administration (WISHA) regulations. BNSF will require the contractor's Health and Safety Plan to define the appropriate engineering control methods and personal protection equipment for the health and safety of their workers. The contractor will be required to have a safety officer on-site at all times. In addition, the contractor's employees are required to attend a BNSF safety orientation.

During operation, BNSF personnel will be required to comply with BNSF's health and safety plan.

b. Noise

1) What types of noise exists in the area which may affect your project (for example: traffic, equipment, operation, other)?

The area is currently a transportation corridor for the BNSF railway; however, train noise will not affect this project. The noise generated by surrounding agricultural work or light industrial work will not affect this project.

2) What types and levels of noise would be created by or associated with the project on a short-term or a long-term basis (for example: traffic, construction, operation, other)? Indicate what hours noise would come from the site.

During construction, operation of heavy equipment will generate noise. Construction times will be limited to daylight hours per the County's and / or City's ordinances. The BNSF will work with the County and / or City if there is a need to work outside the County's and / or City's ordinances.

During operation, noise will be generated by trains. An increase in the number of trains can be anticipated as demand increases. Trains will continue to pass the site 24 hours per day. Train noise is exempt from noise regulation per WAC 173-60-050 (4)(c).

3) Proposed measures to reduce or control noise impacts, if any:

None are proposed.

8. Land and Shoreline Use

a. What is the current use of the site and adjacent properties?

The site is currently used as a railroad corridor.

The adjacent properties consist of agricultural land, and at the northeast portion of the project site, a few light industrial properties.

b. Has the site been used for agriculture? If so, describe.

The project site is part of the BNSF Railway's north-south main line railroad corridor.

c. Describe any structures on the site.

Presently, the site has a set of railroad tracks, signal apparatus, and a signal control bungalow on the rail support structure.

d. Will any structures be demolished? If so, what?

No.

e. What is the current zoning classification of the site?

Established Rail Corridor for roughly 100 years.

f. What is the current comprehensive plan designation of the site?

Established Rail Corridor for roughly 100 years.

g. If applicable, what is the current shoreline master program designation of the site?

Does not apply.

h. Has any part of the site been classified as an "environmentally sensitive" area? If so, specify.

No.

i. Approximately how many people would reside or work in the completed project?

No one would reside at the completed project site. Track maintenance crews of 1-4 persons can be on-site periodically as needed.

j. Approximately how many people would the completed project displace?

None.

k. Proposed measures to avoid or reduce displacement impacts, if any:

No measures are needed.

l. Proposed measures to ensure the proposal is compatible with existing and project land uses and plans, if any:

The proposed siding extension is an enhancement of the existing rail corridor; the rail corridor has been at this site for roughly 100 years.

9. Housing

a. Approximately how many units would be provided, if any? Indicate whether high, middle, or low-income housing.

None.

b. Approximately how many units, if any, would be eliminated? Indicate whether high, middle, or low-income housing.
None.

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control housing impacts, if any:

None are proposed.

10. Aesthetics

a. What is the tallest height of any proposed structure(s), not including antennas; what is the principal exterior building material(s) proposed?

The tallest structures will be two signal posts, located at the southern end of the siding extension, which will be up to 21 feet high. These signal posts will replace two existing signal posts, located midway through the project area. The signal posts are made of steel and painted gray. Aside from these posts, there will be an 8 foot x 8 foot electronics bungalow that is 8 feet high. All other facilities will be within 6 inches of surface level.

b. What views in the immediate vicinity would be altered or obstructed?

The railroad tracks are located on an 8-foot support structure. The height of the support structure will remain the same, but will be 40 feet wider on the east side, with a 70-foot width at the southern end. Since the majority of the surrounding land is agricultural with no nearby houses, any impact to the view will be minimal. Where the light industrial properties are located, either storage lots or parking lots are located adjacent to the BNSF right-of-way. Again, there will be minimal impact on views.

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control aesthetic impacts, if any:

None will be needed.

11. Light and Glare

a. What type of light or glare will the proposal produce? What time of day would it mainly occur?

The only source of light will be the railroad signal system, which will operate continuously. The signal system lights are only visible in a straight line of sight along the tracks.

b. Could light or glare from the finished project be a safety hazard or interfere with views?

No, the purpose of the signal lights is to safely signal trains.

c. What existing off-site sources of light or glare may affect your proposal?

None.

d. Proposed measures to reduce or control light and glare impacts, if any:

None are needed.

12. Recreation

a. What designated and informal recreational opportunities are in the immediate vicinity?

None.

b. Would the proposed project displace any existing recreational uses? If so, describe.

No.

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control impacts on recreation, including recreation opportunities to be provided by the project or applicant, if any:

None.

13. Historic and Cultural Preservation

a. Are there any places or objects listed on, or proposed for, national, state, or local preservation registers known to be on or next to the site? If so, generally describe.

No.

b. Generally describe any landmarks or evidence of historic, archaeological, scientific, or cultural importance known to be on or next to the site.

None.

c. Proposed measures to reduce or control impacts, if any:

Not applicable because there are no impacts.

14. Transportation

a. Identify public streets and highways serving the site, and describe the proposed access to the existing street system. Show on site plans, if any.

Hickox Road currently crosses over the railroad tracks in an east-west direction. Hickox

Road is anticipated to be closed at the railroad tracks as part of this project. Hickox Road intersects with public roads both east and west of the project site, so access is still ensured for residences, farm buildings, and businesses. Please see Hickox Road Railway Crossing Closure Impact Analysis, Mount Vernon, Washington, January 2007 that was completed for the project. The study shows that there are no significant traffic impacts to the community if Hickox Road is closed.

For any proposed closing of a public grade crossing, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission holds a public hearing prior to a closure decision.

b. Is site currently served by public transit? If not, what is the approximate distance to the nearest transit stop?

No.

c. How many parking spaces would the completed project have? How many would the project eliminate?

None.

d. Will the proposal require any new roads or streets, or improvements to existing roads or streets, not including driveways? If so, generally describe (indicate whether public or private).

No new roads or streets are proposed. Minor improvements to the intersection of Hickox Road and Dike Road are recommended in the Hickox Road Railway Crossing Closure Impact Analysis, Mount Vernon, Washington, January 2007. Hickox Road would be closed near the western railroad property line and the roadway surface would be removed.

e. Will the project use (or occur in the immediate vicinity of) water, rail, or air transportation? If so, generally describe.

The project is a rail project designed to allow for additional capacity for rail transportation.

f. How many vehicular trips per day would be generated by the completed project? If known, indicate when peak volumes would occur.

No impacts to vehicular traffic are anticipated.

g. Proposed measures to reduce or control transportation impacts, if any.

Temporary construction impacts to traffic will be managed by working with Skagit County and the City of Mount Vernon. Also, minor street improvements for truck-turning radii at the intersection of Hickox Road and Dike Road are recommended in the Hickox

Road Railway Crossing Closure Impact Analysis, Mount Vernon, Washington, January 2007.

15. Public Services

a. Would the project result in an increased need for public services (for example: fire protection, police protection, health care, schools, other)? If so, generally describe.

No. Established alternate routes exist for fire protection and other public services. Locations west of the tracks can be served by existing fire district facilities without significant response time increases. See Hickox Road Railway Crossing Closure Impact Analysis, Mount Vernon, Washington, January 2007.

b. Proposed measures to reduce or control direct impacts on public services, if any.

None are proposed.

16. Utilities

a. Circle utilities currently available at the site: electricity, natural gas, water, refuse service, telephone, sanitary sewer, septic system, other.

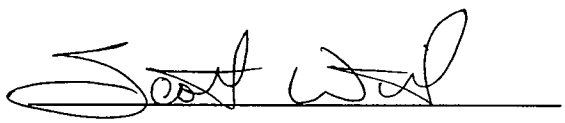
Electricity, natural gas, water, refuse service, telephone, and sanitary sewer are available next to the site. However, only existing electricity for the track signals will be used at the site.

b. Describe the utilities that are proposed for the project, the utility providing the service, and the general construction activities on the site or in immediate vicinity which might be needed.

Only electricity for the track signals will be needed at the site. Puget Sound Energy is the provider.

C. SIGNATURE

The above answers are true and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Signature: 

Date Submitted: 15 October 2007

Mount Vernon siding Extension Project