

## **PROJECT SUMMARY FOR THE STATE ROUTE 14/E OF BINGEN - PORT OF KLICKITAT ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT**

The State Route 14/E of Bingen - Port of Klickitat Access Improvements Project would construct a new grade separated crossing of BNSF's tracks between SR 14 and the Port property near milepost 67. Currently, the public and emergency responders use at-grade railroad crossings to access the Port of Klickitat and Bingen Point from SR 14. With planned economic expansion coupled with anticipated increased train traffic, there will be delays and connectivity issues. The public safety needs identified in the project were to reduce congestion along SR 14 due to train traffic, increase safety and improve connectivity between Bingen Point, the Port of Klickitat, and SR 14 in Klickitat County for economic development purposes.

The public safety needs this project addresses have been a concern in the community for many years. As early as 2007 a plan for a railroad underpass located south of the intersection of Cedar St. and SR 14 was considered for which WSDOT performed a limited preliminary assessment. On February 2, 2011, the first Port of Klickitat Access Stakeholder's meeting took place. At that meeting, stakeholders discussed the need for additional access into the Port of Klickitat at Bingen Point. A representative from BNSF was present at this meeting. Local stakeholders, members of the community, and elected officials began to recognize a need for a transportation study that would collect current and accurate data in the region upon which to assess alternative solutions. All of these documented efforts, along with other stakeholder and elected official discussions culminated in the approval of funding for the current project. In 2016, the Washington State Legislature authorized the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), on behalf of the City of Bingen, to design and construct a grade separated rail crossing. Using Connecting Washington funds, \$22.9 million was originally appropriated for this project with additional increases of \$3.1 million, \$2 million, and \$6.25 million to reach the current budget of \$34.25 million. This is an Economic Development project that also improves safety throughout the region.

Beginning in 2016, WSDOT and the City of Bingen have worked to develop this project using necessary analysis and public engagement to find the right solution for the community. More than six years of coordination with the City of Bingen, Port of Klickitat, Klickitat County, Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) staff, BNSF, and local elected officials, brought the City and WSDOT to the current proposed design for the undercrossing. The City of Bingen and WSDOT selected the proposed design for the undercrossing as the safest, most efficient design within budget.

### **SAFETY BENEFITS OF MAINTAINING BOTH PUBLIC AT-GRADE CROSSINGS IN THE CITY OF BINGEN**

The two existing public at-grade crossings at Maple and Walnut Streets located at Bingen Point are not part of the Washington Legislature's mandated State Route 14/E of Bingen - Port of Klickitat Access Improvements Project. However, maintaining access over these crossings improves overall safety for the City of Bingen and the surrounding areas for the following reasons:

### **COMMUNITY ACCESS**

- Maple and Walnut Streets are public crossings that provide access for business, places of employment, recreation areas and emergency service routes.
- Bingen Point is home to parks, a public boat ramp, and many places of employment including Insitu, a Boeing Company subsidiary that designs, develops, and produces unmanned aircraft systems. The Maple Street crossing is the primary access route for the 1,000+ individuals who work on Bingen Point. The Walnut Street crossing provides the only public retail access to the SDS Lumber Mill.
- The proposed undercrossing design provides ample sidewalks and a bike lane for pedestrian and bicyclist access, reducing those crossing the railroad at-grade.
- The Regional Transportation Council (RTC) conducted two traffic studies that assume a large majority of traffic at the Maple Street at-grade crossing would use the proposed undercrossing. WSDOT and the City of Bingen anticipate that future growth of the Port of Klickitat Property and associated traffic increase will be inclined to use the new undercrossing.
- Maple and Walnut Streets are designated Critical Rural Freight Corridors (CRFCs). CRFCs are important freight corridors that provide critical connectivity to the National Highway Freight Network that is established by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

## **EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACCESS**

In the opinion of the City of Bingen, it is impractical and unsafe to have a single point of public ingress and egress to Bingen Point, either from the current Maple Street or by the proposed undercrossing. This project was originally requested and funded by the Legislature to create an additional crossing to Bingen Point to ensure public safety and provide additional access. WSDOT is dedicated to working with local agencies to deliver transportation solutions that improve safety.

- In November 2016, a Bingen Point Incident Response Plan was completed by Klickitat County Emergency Management in partnership with the local agencies, emergency responders, private business, the Port of Klickitat, WSDOT and BNSF. The plan addresses emergency and non-emergency ingress and egress access. Key points of the response plan include:
  - The top hazard mitigation priority is to improve the safety at railway crossings.
  - Redundancy of routes becomes important in the event that certain crossings are closed, occupied, or blocked allowing access by emergency responders and the escape from Bingen Point in this circumstance.
  - Managing ingress, egress and traffic flow is a significant part of any incident affecting Bingen Point. Congestion and its resulting traffic hazards and travel delays are detrimental to those in the immediate vicinity and in the Columbia Gorge. During more complex incidents the entire region may be affected.
- Emergency response safety benefits of the proposed undercrossing include:
  - A significant reduction of traffic, by more than half, at the current at-grade crossings. Train traffic is expected to increase to a projected 60

trains per day with a typical wait time for vehicular traffic of 3 ½ minutes. On infrequent occasions trains may dwell in the crossing for 30 minutes or more;

- Maintaining redundancy of access and the ability to cross the tracks in the event of an emergency, thereby reducing risk and improving the safety of those in the community; and
- Creating access for emergency vehicles if a train is dwelling in the crossing.
  - In the event of a train derailment or accident, at-grade crossings would likely be blocked, prohibiting access for first responders and trapping everyone on Bingen Point.
  - An emergency at Bingen Point could result in gridlock at the main public crossing (Maple Street 090169V), increasing the likelihood of a train and vehicle collision.
  - The congestion due to an emergency in the area could also prevent emergency responders from accessing Bingen Point.
  - The Walnut crossing cannot be accessed directly from the port except through private property which may not be apparent in the event of an emergency.

The proposed undercrossing, in the current preferred design, will decrease the likelihood and lessen the impact of these issues.

## **RECENT SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS**

- The City of Bingen recently invested in safety improvements to the Walnut Street crossing, with additional safety improvements planned for the Maple Street crossing in the future.

### Walnut Street:

- In 2014, through the Marine and Rail Oil Transportation Study, UTC staff identified the Walnut Street crossing as an under-protected crossing on a crude oil route. In 2016, BNSF applied to the UTC for grant funding through the Grade Crossing Protective Fund (GCPF) to upgrade the existing incandescent flashing lights at the Walnut Street crossing to LEDs. The UTC approved \$8,644 in GCPF funding for the project.
- In 2019, the City spent \$375,000 to improve the Walnut Street crossing by adding constant warning train detection, crossing gates, new batteries and battery chargers, and relocating the signal bungalow. The City applied to the UTC for GCPF funding for a portion of the project and the UTC approved \$19,084 in GCPF funding.

### Maple Street:

- In 2005, the UTC approved safety upgrades to the Maple Street crossing, including the installation of mast-mounted flashing light signals and gates.
- The Legislature has approved \$726,412 for future improvements to the Maple Street crossing.
- In June 2019, the City of Bingen held discussions with BNSF, Klickitat County, and UTC staff regarding safety improvement options, including the addition of median barriers or four-quadrant gates.

