

BEFORE THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

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|--------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| THE CITY OF SUMNER |) | |
| |) | DOCKET NO. TR-001751 |
| |) | |
| Petitioner, |) | ORDER GRANTING PETITION |
| |) | TO CONSTRUCT A NEW |
| v. |) | HIGHWAY-RAIL GRADE |
| |) | CROSSING AT PUYALLUP |
| THE BURLINGTON NORTHERN |) | STREET (PROPOSED) AND |
| SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY |) | RAILROAD MILEPOST 28.02 |
| |) | |
| Respondent |) | |
| |) | |

BACKGROUND

- 1 On December 27, 2001, the City of Sumner filed a petition with the Commission seeking authority to construct a new highway-rail grade crossing at the intersection of the proposed Puyallup Street and the tracks of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company, in the SW ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section 24, Township 20N, Range 4E, W.M., in Sumner, Washington.

- 2 Respondent consented to an entry of an order by the Commission without further notice or hearing.

DISCUSSION

- 3 The proposal is related to another petition, filed by the City of Sumner under Docket TR-001750, that seeks approval for the closure of the highway-rail grade crossing at Williams Avenue. The petition for the closure of the Williams Avenue grade crossing states that “the City’s Comprehensive Transportation Plan recommends the extension of Puyallup Street across the BNSF Railroad to East Valley Highway to provide a better commercial/truck route to serve the industrial areas North of Sumner. The Williams Avenue crossing is at an acute angle to the railroad and the City is willing to replace this crossing with a new improved crossing at Puyallup Street, which is about one-quarter mile northeast of this crossing.” The proposal is essentially the closure of the Williams Avenue grade crossing and the establishment of another crossing at the proposed Puyallup Street location, which will provide for improved traffic circulation within the City.

- 4 The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company maintains two main tracks at the site of the proposed crossing. Average daily train traffic in the vicinity includes 37 freight trains and 18 passenger trains, traveling at speeds of 40 MPH and 65 MPH respectively. These speeds will probably increase to 65 MPH for freight operations and 79 MPH for passenger operations in the near future.

- 5 Puyallup Street, as proposed, will consist of two roadway lanes (one for each direction of traffic), and a vehicle speed limit of 25 MPH. The City of Sumner estimates average daily traffic across the crossing at 1,400, including 154 trucks and four school bus trips. Projected traffic in 20 years is expected to increase to 2,300 vehicles, including 253 trucks and 8 school bus trips. The plans filed with the petition indicate that the proposed Puyallup Street will cross the BNSF tracks at a 90 degree angle. Two buildings are located adjacent to the site of the proposed crossing, in the northwest and southwest quadrants.
- 6 It is contended that the establishment of the Puyallup Street grade crossing, coupled with the closure of the Williams Avenue grade crossing, will improve safety along the railroad corridor within the City. The Williams Avenue crossing consists of ascending approaches on either side of the tracks, creating a “high-profile” or “humped” crossing. Truck traffic is prohibited from using the Williams Avenue crossing to prevent these vehicles from high centering on the tracks. Consequently, much of the City’s truck traffic uses another grade crossing at Zehnder Street, located about .5 mile west of the Williams crossing. Like the Williams crossing, Zehnder Street intersects the BNSF tracks at a skewed angle. Furthermore, the roadway intersection of Zehnder Street and Wood Avenue is located less than 50 feet east of the Zehnder Street grade crossing. When long vehicles stop at a stop sign located at the roadway intersection, they often extend back over the crossing, creating a dangerous situation for both themselves and those aboard approaching trains. The construction of the Puyallup Street extension would divert much of the traffic currently using Zehnder Street to a safer crossing location.
- 7 The petition states that warning devices at the proposed crossing will consist of shoulder-mounted flashing light signals with gates, and train detection circuitry will consist of constant warning devices. In addition, median separators will be installed on each approach to the crossing to prevent motorists from driving around lowered gates. The petitioner plans to install median separators for a distance of 60 feet on either side of the tracks, beginning at the tip of the gate arm.
- 8 The City of Sumner, as State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Lead Agency for the proposal has issued a Determination of Non-Significance threshold determination, thereby satisfying SEPA requirements for the project.
- 9 Commission Staff investigated the petition and recommended that it be granted, subject to specified conditions.
- 10 This matter was brought before the Commission at its regularly scheduled open meeting on March 13, 2002. The Commissioners have reviewed the petition and have been advised in the matter. They believe that granting the petition, subject to the conditions set forth below, is in the public interest, and direct the Secretary to issue the Order.

ORDER

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THE COMMISSION GRANTS the petition of the City of Sumner to construct a highway-rail grade crossing, at the intersection of the proposed Puyallup Street and the tracks of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company, at railroad milepost 28.02, in Sumner, Washington, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) Construction of the crossing must conform to the plans filed in this proceeding.
- (2) The crossing must be hard-surfaced between the rails and for a distance of one foot outside of each rail for the full width of the traveled roadway, including shoulders and sidewalks.
- (3) The roadway grade for 25 feet on each approach to the crossing must be level, according to the plane created by the rails.
- (4) Traffic control devices must comply with all applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.
- (5) Upon completion of the construction and installations authorized herein, petitioner must notify the Commission. Acceptance of the grade crossing is subject to a compliance inspection by Commission Staff, verifying that the completed project is in full compliance with law, regulation, and the conditions specified herein.

DATED at Olympia, Washington and effective this 13th of March, 2002.

THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CAROLE J. WASHBURN
Secretary