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Carole J. Washburn, Executive Secretary
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
PO Box 47250
Olympia, WA 98504-7250

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STATE OF WASH
UTIL AND TRANSP
COMMISSION

Dear Ms. Washburn,

I am writing in regard to Docket # 070696, Burlington Northern's request to close the Hickox Road crossing as a part of their expansion of the south Mt. Vernon siding in Skagit County. As I live in Conway, four miles south of the crossing in question, for twenty two years, I am very familiar with the area and have some sense of its history and its future.

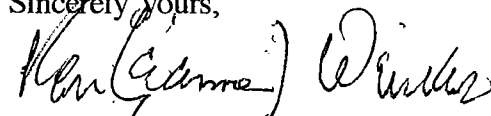
While I can understand why Burlington Northern would like to close the Hickox crossing—the fewer crossings the less danger and expense and the faster the trains can run—I think closing the Hickox crossing would be extremely short-sighted, an immediate benefit, perhaps, to the railroad, but harmful to the local residents and to the county.

First, as Mt. Vernon continues to grow, as it already is, to the South, Hickox Road will be more, not less, in use. Second, if it were closed, the Cedardale Fire Department would have to travel three extra miles to reach homes and businesses in the area in question. Third, the rail line already straddles businesses and properties in the area and closing one of the crossings, particularly that which is now most used and which we know will be used more and more, can only create a certain present inconvenience and a possible future tragedy if emergency vehicles do not have efficient access to a growing area. Fourth, Hickox Road is already the most convenient route to southbound I-5 traffic for a significant number of commuters, another number which can only increase.

Local citizens do understand the need to expand the railroad siding and are willing to wait longer than they presently do at the Hickox Road crossing if necessary. We just do not see the reason to close Hickox Road to all vehicle traffic and have not heard any argument, other than some immediate savings to Burlington Northern to do so.

Thanks for listening.

Sincerely yours,



Ken and Anne Winkes