

MEMORANDUM

June 25, 2004

To: TR-041017 File

From: Ahmer Nizam

Subject: Woodinville SR 202 rail crossing project

The petition filed by the City of Woodinville on June 1, 2004, and docketed under TR-041017 is ambiguous as to the scope of work that is planned at the SR-202 railroad-highway grade crossing. The petition states that the work involves relocating the cantilever-mounted signal and bungalow in the crossing's southwest quadrant, and that the railroad gates are "no longer necessary at this crossing."

On June 24, 2004, I met with City of Woodinville Public Works Director, Mick Monken, and Traffic Engineer, Joe Seet, to better understand the aspects of their proposal that are under the jurisdiction of the Commission. After discussing the project with them, I learned that the work is primarily related to a roadway intersection reconstruction and signalization project at SR-202 (175th Street) and SR-202 (Woodinville Drive). The grade crossing is located 65 feet northeast of the roadway intersection.

The aspects of the project that will affect the grade crossing include 1) Constructing an addition lane through the crossing (approaching Woodinville Drive) and relocating the cantilever-mounted signals accordingly; 2) Interconnecting the new highway traffic signals at the 175th Street/Woodinville Drive intersection with the railroad warning signals; and 3) Removal of gates from the grade crossing warning system.

The project is proposed in the interest of improving traffic safety and efficiency in the City. The roadway intersection is controlled by stop signs and is currently a source of major back-ups in the City – especially during peak hours. ADT through the intersection is currently 10,000, and is expected to double in 20 years. The additional lane through the crossing and leading to the roadway intersection will help to facilitate right turns and will eliminate current illegal driving on the



shoulder to make right turns¹. The traffic signal will help to move traffic through the intersection more efficiently. The final item for discussion is the gates.

Both the City and BNSF agree that gates are not needed at the grade crossing. They cite negligible train traffic (1-5 moves per year), slow train speeds (RR stop signs posted at crossing), and costs related to maintenance and relocation of the gates. The City also alleges that keeping the gates in and necessitating the relocation of the gates relative to the new roadway lane would "kill the project" due to an extremely tight budget.

At the meeting I posed some questions to the City regarding removal of the gates:

- 1) What is the reasoning behind wanting to remove the gates? *BNSF approached them with the idea. They don't feel that the gates serve any real purpose and that maintaining them is wasteful. The practically non-existent train traffic and the fact that trains have to stop justifies removal of the gates.*
- 2) If the new traffic signals are interconnected with the railroad warning devices, won't the gates serve a purpose during preemption by acting as a queue-cutter (*i.e.* when the clear green phase is in effect, the gates will prevent vehicles behind the tracks from trying to make the green, and potentially trapping more vehicles on the tracks)? *The City generally agrees that this is necessary, but only when trains have the right-of-way. In this case, trains have to stop and proceed when the crossing is clear, and the probability of anyone being hit by a train or hitting a train is virtually non-existent.*

¹ The initial road widening involves adding only one lane eastbound. In the next few years, Woodinville will add an additional two lanes westbound.