

TR-070696

City of **Mount** **Vernon**

Mayor

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December 6, 2006

Kathy Hunter, Transportation Safety Compliance Mgr.
Washington Utilities & Transportation Commission
1300 S Evergreen Pk Dr SW
PO Box 47250, Olympia, WA 98504-7250

RECEIVED
06 DEC -7 11:01 AM
MOUNT VERNON, WA

Dear Ms. Hunter:

As Mayor of the City of Mount Vernon, I want to go on record as being very much in opposition to the proposed rail road grade crossing closure at Hickox Road in Mount Vernon.

I am the chairman of the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) and that organization has sent you a letter opposing the referenced closure. I'm in complete agreement with that letter, and for the benefit of those who I am carbon copying; I'm going to repost the letter's important points as follows:

- Hickox Road offers important safety and economic benefits to the residents and businesses in the area. Residential access to fire and emergency medical services would be detrimentally impacted by the proposed closure. While we, as a region, desire improved passenger and freight rail service, absent effective mitigation of these concerns, we oppose this closure.
- In addition, closure of the crossing precludes expansion of Hickox in the future. A current WSDOT operational analysis of I-5 is examining at what point a full interchange at Hickox Road might make operational sense. Closure would add to the public cost of such a future improvement, by obviating the need for the BN Railroad to participate financially.
- Roads such as Hickox are critical to the regions they serve, and should only be considered for this kind of major alteration as a last resort. Without a complete review of alternatives such as moving the proposed siding, waiving blockage limitations, or installing better gating systems and demonstrating that none of these are workable, we ask that any application for closure of this facility be summarily dismissed. We would also request that jurisdictions and the RTPO and MPO be consulted at the beginning of any similar proposal at other locations in the future. This could save time, expense, and encourage the kind of trust essential to good collaborative decision-making.

Thank you for your help and assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Bud Norris
Mayor

cc: City Council
Department Managers
Skagit Council of Governments