



STATE OF WASHINGTON

UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

1300 S. Evergreen Park Dr. S.W., P.O. Box 47250 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7250

(360) 664-1160 • TTY (360) 586-8203

February 20, 2015

Kelli Linville, Mayor
City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

Re: TR-144162, Notice of Intent to Establish a Railroad Quiet Zone in the City of Bellingham

Dear Mayor Linville:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed quiet zone in the City of Bellingham, to include the following public at-grade railroad-highway crossings:

1. Harris Avenue, USDOT #084798U
2. Alaska Ferry access on 6th Street, USDOT #084800T
3. Bayview Drive, USDOT #084805C

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (commission) received notice on December 26, 2014, from the City of Bellingham (City) of its intent to establish a railroad quiet zone. The City proposes a quiet zone that will be in effect 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The notice provided to the commission did not specify the length of the proposed quiet zone. Commission staff (staff) assumes that the City is proposing a quiet zone extending one-quarter mile on each side of the crossings which is the minimum length required by Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 49, Part 222.35.

Staff updated information for each railroad-highway crossing in the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) database and used this information to calculate the Quiet Zone Risk Index (QZRI). The QZRI is one tool available to help determine whether a quiet zone qualifies at a given location. As each of the three crossings now stand, the QZRI for the intended quiet zone is 17,797.67 which exceeds the current Nationwide Significant Risk Threshold of 14,347. In its notice, the City committed to upgrades at each of the crossings, to include four-quadrant gates and installation of medians to channel traffic at each crossing and reduce the possibility of

Mayor Kelli Linville

February 20, 2015

Page 2

motorists driving around downed gates when a train is approaching. These supplemental safety measures have a positive effect on the QZRI, lowering it from 17,796.67 to 1,423.81.

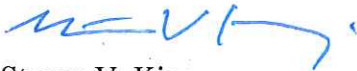
Bob Boston, commission staff, conducted on-site assessments of the crossings within the intended quiet zone on January 26, 2015. Mr. Boston believes that based on his field observations, coupled with installation of the additional supplemental safety measures described by the City in its notice, it is reasonable to establish a quiet zone as described in the City's Notice of Intent.

The City's notice included a fourth crossing, a pedestrian crossing at Boulevard Park (USDOT #919108C). With installation of active warning devices, channelization/fencing in the area Mr. Boston considers these upgrades reasonable mitigation of the absence of a train horn at the pedestrian crossing. Please note, however, that CFR 49, Part 222.27 includes specific requirements that the public authority must do in order to include a pedestrian crossing in a quiet zone. The City may wish to refer to the CFR to ensure it has met all requirements.

Under current federal rules, the commission may comment on a quiet zone, but it does not have the authority to approve or disprove them. Based on staff's site visit and the commitments made by the City to install supplemental safety measures at each crossing, it is staff's opinion that these are reasonable upgrades to the crossing that lie within the intended quiet zone area. Staff suggests the City refer to CFR 49, Part 222.27, to ensure it has met all requirements regarding the pedestrian crossing.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Please feel free to contact Kathy Hunter at 360-664-1257 or by email at khunter@utc.wa.gov if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Steven V. King
Executive Director and Secretary

cc: Richard Wagner, BNSF Railway Co.
Alvin Richardson, Amtrak
Ahmer Nizam, Washington State Department of Transportation
FRA Office of Safety, Washington DC
Christine Adams, Federal Railroad Administration
Rory Routhe, City of Bellingham