

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON  
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

WASHINGTON STATE	)	DOCKET TR-150624
DEPARTMENT OF	)	
TRANSPORTATION,	)	ORDER 01
	)	
Petitioner,	)	ORDER GRANTING PETITION TO
	)	RECONSTRUCT AND
CENTRAL PUGET SOUND	)	INTERCONNECT THE RAILROAD
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION	)	WARNING AND HIGHWAY
AUTHORITY (SOUND TRANSIT),	)	TRAFFIC SIGNALS AT A PUBLIC
BNSF RAILWAY CO., TACOMA	)	RAILROAD-HIGHWAY GRADE
RAIL, CITY OF LAKEWOOD,	)	CROSSING AT NORTH THORNE
	)	LANE SOUTHWEST IN LAKEWOOD
Respondents.	)	
	)	USDOT: 085828M
.....	)	

**BACKGROUND**

- 1 On April 15, 2015, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT or Petitioner) filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission), a petition seeking approval to modify a railroad-highway grade crossing and interconnect the railroad signals with new and existing traffic signals. The crossing is identified as USDOT 085282M and is located at the intersection of North Thorne Lane in Lakewood. Modifying the crossing is part of the Point Defiance Bypass project.
- 2 The Point Defiance Bypass project is a partnership between Central Puget Sound Regional Transportation Authority (Sound Transit) and WSDOT to improve the reliability of the Amtrak Cascades passenger service between Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, and to extend commuter rail service to Lakewood. Currently, passenger trains slow down to maneuver on the curved tracks along southern Puget Sound and share the track with freight trains. Once construction of the project is complete in 2017, passenger trains will travel on an 18-mile inland “bypass” route that runs along the west side of Interstate 5 (I-5), from south Tacoma through Lakewood and DuPont. On-time reliability will improve to 88 percent and provide a ten minute reduction in travel time between Portland and Seattle. Completion of the Point Defiance Bypass project will also enable the Amtrak long distance service, the Coast Starlight, to utilize this new alignment. Most freight trains will continue to use the existing tracks along Puget Sound.

- 3 Safety improvements will be made at nine public highway-rail grade crossings in phases over several years. This petition represents safety improvements at one of the four remaining grade crossings in phase two. Related petitions are TR-150508 – Barksdale Avenue; TR-150509 - 41<sup>st</sup> Division Drive; TR-150623 - Clover Creek Drive Southwest. The petition filed in TR-143846, which involved the Berkeley Street Southwest crossing, was approved by the Commission on December 30, 2014.
- 4 Tacoma Rail and BNSF Railway Co., (BNSF) operate freight trains on this corridor of track which is owned by Sound Transit. WSDOT is responsible for maintaining the traffic signals located near the crossing which are currently interconnected with the existing railroad warning devices. The City of Lakewood is the road authority. All Respondents have consented to entry of an Order by the Commission without further notice or hearing.
- 5 Tacoma Rail and BNSF operate up to two freight trains per day at up to 40 miles per hour over the single mainline crossing. Currently no passenger trains operate over the crossing, but this will change when WSDOT and Sound Transit expand passenger service on this line in the future. WSDOT predicts up to 16 passenger trains will operate over the crossing on a daily basis at speeds up to 79 miles per hour.
- 6 North Thorne Lane Southwest is classified as a minor arterial with three lanes (one northbound and two southbound) and a posted vehicle speed limit of 25 miles per hour. Average daily traffic through the crossing is estimated at 8,050 vehicles. North Thorne Lane Southwest is a designated truck route with up to three percent truck traffic. Four school buses travel over this crossing on weekdays.
- 7 Warning devices at the North Thorne Lane Southwest crossing include cantilever and shoulder-mounted lights, crossbucks, pavement markings, “Do Not Stop on Tracks” signs, and advance warning signs. The existing nearby traffic signal located at the southbound I-5 freeway ramp is interconnected with the railroad warning signals in simultaneous preemption mode.
- 8 WSDOT proposes to install shoulder-mounted lights and gates to replace the existing outdated warning devices. In addition, pedestrian crossing gates will be installed on both approaches to the newly-constructed sidewalk on the north side of the North Thorne Lane Southwest crossing. Fencing will be installed near the pedestrian gates to channelize users to the appropriate location to cross the railroad tracks. In addition, the fencing will

deter users from walking around the downed gates. Pedestrian exit gates will also be installed on both approaches to the crossing to allow pedestrians to leave if the crossing gate comes down behind them. A buffer strip will be installed between the sidewalk and the concrete curb to delineate the sidewalk from the roadway. WSDOT will maintain the sidewalk. Median barriers will be installed on the east and west sides of the tracks. The median barriers will deter motorists from driving around lowered gates.

- 9 WSDOT also proposes to install wayside horns on both approaches to the crossing as a one-for-one substitution of the traditional train horn. With higher-speed train operations, the train horn would begin sounding farther from the crossing, near residential and business areas. The installation of wayside horns will confine the sound near the crossing and minimize noise in areas where an audible warning is not needed for safety purposes.
- 10 Two interconnected, activated “No Right Turn” blank-out signs will be installed at the intersections of the I-5 southbound off ramp and North Thorne Lane Southwest/Union Avenue Southwest. The blank-out signs will illuminate when the advance preemption is activated by an approaching train.
- 11 WSDOT proposes to reconfigure and install new traffic signals near the crossing. The end result will be three traffic signals, run by one controller, using a six-wire connection. The preemption will be changed to 18 seconds of advance preemption time to ensure that all vehicle and pedestrian traffic is cleared before the arrival of the train at the crossing. A new highway ramp meter located nearby will also be interconnected to the railroad signals. This interconnection will send a preemption signal from the railroad bungalow to the ramp meter which will trigger the ramp meter to change operation to green or dark when activated. This interconnection will provide additional risk minimization for traffic backing up over the crossing from the freeway ramp. This interconnection is a one-direction signal from the railroad signals to the ramp meter signal. Constant-warning train detection will also be installed as part of the upgrades to the crossing.
- 12 The concrete crossing surface will be extended and flangeway filler installed in this portion of the crossing surface. The extended crossing surface is necessary to accommodate the reconfigured sidewalk. The flangeway filler provides a smooth surface for pedestrians and bicyclists traversing the crossing.

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 13 (1) The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission is an agency of the State of Washington having jurisdiction over public railroad-highway grade crossings within the state of Washington. *Chapter 81.53 RCW.*
- 14 (2) The North Thorne Lane Southwest grade crossing, identified as USDOT 085828M, is a public railroad-highway grade crossing within the state of Washington.
- 15 (3) RCW 81.53.261 and WAC 480-62-150 require that the Commission grant approval prior to modifying a public railroad-highway grade crossing or upgrading active crossing warning signals or devices within the state of Washington.
- 16 (4) Commission Staff investigated the petition and recommended that it be granted with conditions.
- 17 (5) After examination of the petition filed by the Washington State Department of Transportation on April 15, 2015, and giving consideration to all relevant matters and for good cause shown, the Commission grants the petition.

### ORDER

#### THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

- 18 The petition of the Washington State Department of Transportation to modify a railroad-highway grade crossing at the intersection of North Thorne Lane Southwest and the Respondents' tracks in the city of Lakewood, is granted. Approval of the petition is subject to the following conditions:
- (1) The modifications must conform to those described and attached to the petition.
  - (1) The Washington State Department of Transportation will, for a period of three years, provide an annual report to the Commission within ten days of the anniversary date of this Order. At a minimum, the annual

report will contain information about the number of queuing instances over the crossing, impacts and analysis of effectiveness of the interconnection between the railroad signals and the ramp meter.

- (2) Traffic control devices must comply with all applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
- (3) Upon completion of the authorized construction, the Petitioner must notify the Commission within 30 days. Acceptance of the changes is subject to inspection by Commission Staff, verifying that the crossing is in full compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and the conditions set forth in this order

The Secretary of the Commission has delegated authority over this matter pursuant to Order 03 in Docket A-090485. The Secretary finds this Order to be consistent with the public interest.

DATED at Olympia, Washington, and effective July 2, 2015.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

STEVEN V. KING, Executive Director and Secretary

NOTICE: This is an order delegated to the Secretary for decision. In addition to serving you a copy of the decision, the Commission will post on its Internet Web site for at least fourteen (14) days a listing of all matters delegated to the Secretary for decision. You may seek Commission review of this decision. You must file a request for Commission review of this order no later than fourteen (14) days after the date the decision is posted on the Commission's Web site. The Commission will schedule your request for review for consideration at a regularly scheduled open meeting. The Commission will notify you of the time and place of the open meeting at which the Commission will review the order.

The Commission will grant a late-filed request for review only on a showing of good cause, including a satisfactory explanation of why the person did not timely file the request. A form for late-filed requests is available on the Commission's Web site.

This notice and review process is pursuant to the provisions of RCW 80.01.030 and WAC 480-07-904(2) and (3).