

- 5 WSDOT plans to reconstruct SR-161 in Graham so that it has five lanes of traffic and one gravel pathway on either side of the roadway. The proposed lane configuration includes two 11-foot northbound lanes, two 11-foot southbound lanes, and one 12-foot center turn lane. The roadway portion crossing the tracks will include only four traffic lanes. This will be achieved by essentially eliminating the center turn lane across the tracks. Although the roadway width through the crossing (approximately 85 feet) will not change relative to the approaches, the center lane through the crossing will be striped as a median, and will include a row of 2.3-foot high plastic delineators for 50-feet from the crossing on the south side and 100 feet from the crossing on the north side to emphasize the closure of the lane.
- 6 The proposal is also related to a previous Commission order entered on October 12, 1982, under Docket No. TR-1633. That order granted a petition by the Washington State Department of Transportation for the installation of “Exempt” signs at the SR-161 grade crossing. The “Exempt” status of the crossing allows vehicles otherwise required to stop (*e.g.* school buses) to proceed without doing so. The Commission granted the petition in TR-1633 after having determined that traffic safety concerns associated with vehicles stopping at the tracks outweighed any potential hazards related to vehicle-train conflict.
- 7 In its “discussion” of the proposal, the order in TR-1633 states: “If respondent (the Chehalis Western Railroad Company, which has since been succeeded by Tacoma Rail) should desire to begin railroad service which necessitates periodic but regular use of the crossing, the respondent must petition the Commission before such service is initiated, to request a change in signalization and procedure appropriate to the proposed use ...” The petition filed in TR-041878 also represents the fulfillment of this requirement, as amended in TR-040357.
- 8 Warning devices at the crossing consist of passive devices only. Currently, all train traffic is required to stop prior to entering the limits of the SR-161 crossing

and be flagged across the roadway by train crews. Petitioner seeks to upgrade warning devices by installing cantilever-mounted signals with gates. Installation of such devices would eliminate the “stop and protect” requirement currently in effect at the crossing. The upgrades are consistent with the roadway changes planned by WSDOT are proposed in the interest of improving safety for roadway users.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 9 (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.*
- 10 (2) The SR-161 grade crossing, identified as USDOT 397139F, is a public railroad-highway grade crossing within the state of Washington.
- 11 (3) RCW 81.53.060 requires that the Commission grant approval prior to any reconstruction of public railroad-highway grade crossings within the state of Washington.
- 12 (4) Commission Staff investigated the petition and recommended that it be granted, subject to specified conditions.
- 13 (5) This matter was brought before the Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on November 24, 2004.
- 14 (6) After examination of the petition filed by the Washington State Department of Transportation on October 25, 2004, and giving consideration to all relevant matters and for good cause shown, the Commission grants the petition.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

15 The petition of the Washington State Department of Transportation to upgrade warning devices and reconstruct a railroad-highway grade crossing, located at the intersection of SR-161 and the tracks of Tacoma Rail, in Graham, Washington, is granted, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) The upgrades must conform to the plans and specifications filed in this proceeding.
- (2) The crossing must be hard-surfaced between the rails and for a distance of at least one foot outside each rail for the full width of the traveled roadway, including any shoulders and pedestrian facilities.
- (3) Traffic control devices must comply with all applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.
- (4) Traffic control devices and instrument housing must be installed in such a manner as to provide required clearances from both the roadway and railroad tracks.
- (5) All signs bearing the word "Exempt" must be removed.
- (6) Upon completion of the reconstruction authorized herein, petitioner must notify the Commission. 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 specified herein.

The Commissioners, having determined that this filing complies with the requirements of RCW 81.53.060, directed the Secretary to enter this order.

DOCKET NO. TR-041878
ORDER NO. 01

PAGE 5

DATED at Olympia, Washington, and effective this 24th day of November, 2004.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CAROLE J. WASHBURN, Secretary