

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON  
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

In the Matter of the Petition of

GREAT NORTHWEST RAILROAD,

Petitioner,

To Construct a Public Railroad-Highway  
Grade Crossing

DOCKET TR-160863

ORDER 01

ORDER GRANTING PETITION TO  
CONSTRUCT A PUBLIC  
RAILROAD-HIGHWAY GRADE  
CROSSING AT WILMA DRIVE

USDOT: TBD

**BACKGROUND**

- 1 On July 1, 2016, Great Northwest Railroad (GRNW or Company), filed a petition with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) seeking approval to construct a public railroad-highway grade crossing at Wilma Drive in Whitman County. The crossing will be located at the western end of Wilma Drive near the intersection of Druffle Drive and Wilma Drive in the Port of Wilma. The railroad tracks, which are classified as an industrial spur, will cross Wilma Drive at railroad mile post 65.51.
- 2 The decision to construct an at-grade-crossing at this location results from the need to provide rail service to a new fertilizer storage and distribution center and decrease rail congestion on the main spur line within the Port of Wilma. The new crossing will remove cars from the main spur line, where visual blockages sometimes occur for traffic in the Port. The crossing cannot be grade separated because of constraints of the track geometry, site elevation changes, the location of the current Port track, and the location of the proposed facility.
- 3 Whitman County is the road authority and consented to entry of an Order without further notice or hearing.
- 4 Wilma Drive is classified as a two-lane county road with a speed limit of 25 miles per hour. The Whitman County estimates average annual daily traffic at 360 vehicles, including 47 percent commercial motor vehicles. No school buses will use the crossing.
- 5 One train consisting of 12 cars will travel over the crossing each day, five days per week. The maximum freight train speed is five miles per hour. No passenger trains will use this crossing.

6 Installation of active warning devices is not required at this crossing because rail and  
vehicle traffic levels do not meet federal or state thresholds for signalization. The passive  
crossing will be protected by yield signs, crossbucks, emergency notification system  
signs, retroreflective tape, and advance warning signs.

7 The Port of Whitman County, as State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) lead agency for  
the proposal, has issued a Mitigated Determination of Non-significance thereby  
completing the SEPA procedures for the opening of a grade crossing.

8 RCW 81.53.020 requires that all new highway-railroad grade crossings be grade  
separated where practicable. Highway-railroad grade crossings may be authorized at-  
grade by the Commission but only upon finding that grade separation is impracticable.

9 Commission Staff (Staff) investigated GRNW's petition to construct the Wilma Drive  
crossing at-grade. Staff recommends that the Commission find grade separation  
impracticable at this location based on the low train and vehicle traffic, constraints of the  
track geometry, site elevation changes, the location of the current Port track, and the  
location of the facility. In addition, Staff utilized the Federal Highway Administration's  
Grade Separation Guidelines and determined that construction of a grade separated  
crossing at Wilma Drive does not meet the minimum threshold. GRNW is proposing  
installing passive warning devices when the crossing is constructed which address site-  
specific safety issues.

10 Examination of the petition and consideration of relevant facts support granting the  
petition subject to the following condition:

- (a) Traffic control devices, advance warning signs, and pavement markings must  
comply with applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation  
*Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)*.

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

11 (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. RCW 81.53.

12 (2) The proposed construction of a crossing involves a public railroad-highway grade  
crossing, as defined in RCW 81.53.010.

- 13 (3) RCW 81.53.030 and WAC 480-62-150(1)(a) require the Commission grant approval prior to constructing a public railroad-highway grade crossing within the state of Washington.
- 14 (4) RCW 81.53.020 requires all new railroad-highway grade crossings to be grade separated where practicable. The Commission finds that it is not practicable to build the tracks over or under Wilma Drive.
- 15 (5) Commission Staff conducted an investigation and recommended that the petition be granted. Granting the petition is subject to the following condition:
- (a) In addition to the crossbucks and on the same sign posts, GRNW must install “yield” signs as required by the MUTCD in December 2019.
  - (b) GRNW must install retro-reflective tape on the sign posts as required by the MUTCD in December 2019.
  - (c) GRNW must install emergency notification signs (I-13), as required by the MUTCD.
  - (d) Traffic control devices, advance warning signs, and pavement markings must comply with applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.
- 16 (6) After examination of the petition filed by GRNW on July 1, 2016, and giving consideration to all relevant matters, the Commission has determined that construction of a public railroad-highway grade crossing at Wilma Drive is reasonable and the petition of GRNW should be granted.

**O R D E R**

**THE COMMISSION ORDERS:**

- 17 (1) The petition of Great Northwest Railroad to construct a public railroad-highway grade crossing at Wilma Drive in Whitman county, Washington, is granted, subject to the following conditions:
- (a) All construction and installation must be substantially conform to the petition and engineering design plans filed in this Docket.

- (b) In addition to the crossbucks and on the same sign posts, GRNW must install “yield” signs as required by the MUTCD in December 2019.
- (c) GRNW must install retro-reflective tape on the sign posts as required by the MUTCD in December 2019.
- (d) GRNW must install emergency notification signs (I-13), as required by the MUTCD.
- (e) Traffic control devices, advance warning signs, and pavement markings must comply with applicable standards specified in the U.S. Department of Transportation *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.
- (f) Upon completion of the authorized construction, 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 Commissioners, having determined this Order to be consistent with the public interest, directed the Secretary to enter this Order.

Dated at Olympia, Washington, and effective July 21, 2016.

**WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

**STEVEN V. KING, Executive Director and Secretary**