Skagit Council of Governments

SKAGIT SUB-REGIONAL RTPO/MPO

204 W Montgomery - Mount Vernon, WA 98273 - (360) 416-7877 - Fax (360) 416-7831

December 7, 2006

Kathy Hunter
1300 S Evergreen Pk Dr SW
PO Box 47250, Olympia, WA 98504-7250

Dear Ms. Hunter:

The Skagit sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization and the Skagit Metropolitan Planning Organization would like to express our opposition to the proposed grade crossing closure at Hickox Road in Mount Vernon.

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, any application for closure of this facility must 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 thanks again for your time in helping clarify issues and processes in this situation.

Sincerely,

Sharon Dillon, Chair, Skagit MPO

Dean Maxwell, Chair, Skagit sub-RTPO