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STATE OF WASH.
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BEFORE THE WASHINGTON STATE
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CITY OF KENNEWICK,

Petitioner,

v.

UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD,

Respondents.

No. TR-040664

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF
STEVE PLUMMER

INTRODUCTION

1. Please state your full name and job title.

Steve Plummer, Project Engineer for the City of Kennewick.

2. Please provide your education.

Graduate of Spokane Community College in Civil Engineering Technology 1978.

Graduate of Spokane Falls Community College in Liberal Arts 1976.

3. How long have you been employed by the City of Kennewick?

I began my employment with the City of Kennewick on July 31, 1989.

1 **4. Please describe your work duties?**

2 Project management for the Columbia Center Boulevard/BNSF Grade Separation Project,
3 the Center Parkway Extension/Gage Boulevard Widening Project, the Zone 3 Reservoir
4 Project, the Zone 4 and 5 Reservoir Design, the City-wide Transportation System Plan,
5 the Steptoe Street Project Development Plan, the City of Kennewick Storm Water
6 Management Plan and the US 395/27th Avenue and 36th Avenue Intersection
7 Improvements. I represent/have represented the City on the Eastern Washington Model
8 Storm Water Program Sub-Committee, the Underground Injection Control Technical
9 Advisory Committee, the NPDES Phase 2 General Permit for Construction Storm Water
10 Activities Advisory Committee and the Eastern Washington Storm Water Manual
11 Hydrologic Analysis Sub-Committee. I develop project estimates for grant applications,
12 assist with biennial budget preparation, and assist with the development of the City Six-
13 Year Capital Improvement Program.

14
15 **5. Can you describe your role on the Center Parkway extension project?**

16 Management of the consultant agreement for the design of this project. Coordination with
17 other agencies and entities to resolve conflicts and design issues. Administration of the
18 federal grants for the project.

19
20 **6. Has the City consulted with any outside sources on the Center Parkway**
21 **project?**

22 The firm of SCM Consultants, Inc. was hired to perform the design services for the
23 project. The firm of HDR Engineers, Inc., as a sub-consultant to SCM Consultants, Inc.,
24 has performed conceptual design work regarding alternative track configurations for
25 maintaining switching operations at Richland Junction. The firm of HDR Engineers, Inc.

1 was also hired directly to assist with negotiations between the City and Union Pacific
2 Railroad to relocate switching operations between Union Pacific Railroad and Tri-City &
3 Olympia Railroad to another location. The firm of Foster, Pepper & Shefelman PLLC was
4 consulted concerning the feasibility of condemning a crossing of the Union Pacific
5 Railroad right-of-way.

6 **7. *Can you identify each outside entity and its role on this project?***

7 The City of Richland is an equal partner in the project. Public Utility District #1 of Benton
8 County has an electrical sub-station adjacent to the project. The City will be required to
9 acquire right-of-way from the PUD as well as maintain ingress/egress for tractor/trailers
10 post-project. Other right-of-way acquisition will be required from the Mall (Simon Corp.),
11 Columbia Center West, Banner Bank, and Columbia Center Estates. Mail by the Mall will
12 require relocation. We will require a crossing of the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way
13 and the Port of Benton right-of-way. The Port of Benton right-of-way was deeded to them
14 by the Department of Energy and is under lease to the Tri-City & Olympia Railroad. The
15 right-of-way within the Richland city limits was donated by developers. A Rural
16 Economic Vitality grant was obtained through the Community Economic Revitalization
17 Board, an STP Regional Competitive grant was obtained through the Benton Franklin
18 Governmental Council and the City of Richland has dedicated a portion of its STP Direct
19 Allocation funds to the project.

20
21 **8. *Who would you consider to be the lead person in charge of making technical***
22 ***decisions related to the grade crossing?***

23 SCM Consultants has been contracted to provide the design services for the project. As
24 project engineer there are many design issues that can be resolved at my level, however,
25 the City Engineer must ultimately approve the plans and specifications.

1 **9. Who made the final decision on whether an above or below grade crossing**
2 **was feasible?**

3 A grade separated crossing was not considered economically feasible from project
4 inception by both Cities and our consultant.

6 **10. Who made the final decision on whether an at-grade crossing was**
7 **technically feasible?**

8 The Kennewick City Engineer, Kennewick Traffic Engineer, and myself determined the
9 feasibility of an at-grade crossing.

11 **11. In making that decision, who evaluated the safety issues related to an at-**
12 **grade crossing?**

13 The Kennewick City Engineer, Kennewick Traffic Engineer, and myself.

15 **12. In general, what are the risks of an at-grade crossing?**

16 The potential for vehicle-train conflicts, pedestrian-train conflicts, emergency vehicle
17 delays, and general traffic delays.

19 **13. What specific risks would this project present if an at-grade crossing is**
20 **constructed?**

21 There are no known risks specific to this project. The potential for vehicle-train conflicts
22 and pedestrian-train conflicts at this crossing would be less than at a mainline crossing due
23 to the low volume of train traffic, the low speed of train traffic and the low speed of
24 vehicular traffic.

1 **14. *Has anyone projected the volume of traffic on Center Parkway if it is***
2 ***extended?***

3 The Transpo Group completed a study in July 1997 (see page 7 of the design report by
4 SCM Consultants attached as Exhibit 1).

5
6 **15. *Can you describe the number of lanes of travel and the project speed limit in***
7 ***the area of the extension?***

8 One lane of traffic in each direction is proposed. The posted speed limit will depend on
9 the final vertical alignment at the crossings and will be a minimum of 15 MPH to a
10 maximum of 30 MPH.

11
12 **16. *Can you provide the projected traffic volume for this project?***

13 Projected volumes initially are 2,200 average daily traffic (ADT), increasing to 4,250
14 ADT by the year 2023 (see figures 3b and 3c of the design report by SCM Consultants).

15
16 **17. *Please describe the topography of the area of the extension.***

17 The elevations are depicted in Exhibits 2 – 4 attached herein. Between Gage Boulevard
18 and the UPRR tracks is developed commercial property and the BPUD sub-station. East
19 of the proposed roadway in this area is undeveloped commercial property.

20 Between the UPRR tracks and the TC&ORR tracks is a tract used for RV storage and
21 owned by the Columbia Center Estates Homeowners Association.

22 Between the TC&ORR tracks and Tapteal Drive is the partially constructed portion of
23 Center Parkway. A Holiday Inn Express lies to the east and undeveloped commercial
24 property to the west.

25

1 The length of the proposed roadway from the intersection at Gage Boulevard to the
2 intersection at Tapteal Drive is approximately 1,670 linear feet. The elevation at Gage
3 Boulevard is 447.50 feet; the elevation at the UPRR southerly track is 446.60 feet; the
4 elevation at the UPRR northerly track is 446.07 feet; the elevation at the TC&ORR
5 southerly track is 442.60 feet; the elevation at the TC&ORR northerly track is 442.69 feet;
6 the elevation at Tapteal Drive is 409.39.

7
8 **18. Please describe any difficulties that an at-grade crossing presents due to the**
9 **topography of the area between the tracks.**

10 Attached herein as Exhibit 5 is an exhibit that depicts how an at-grade profile would be
11 accomplished and look. If no changes were permitted to the existing tracks, the transition
12 between the two crossings would be abrupt by roadway standards. It would be
13 approximately the same as pulling into a driveway; therefore the posted speed limit would
14 be 15 MPH.

15
16 **19. If an at-grade crossing is granted, describe what it would be like, and if**
17 **helpful, refer to any exhibits that will depict the final product. Include in**
18 **your description the lanes of travel, gates, and crossing signals.**

19 An at-grade crossing, with the tracks left in their existing position, would create a street
20 profile very similar to a City of Kennewick standard driveway. This is not desirable, but
21 easily traversable by all vehicles, including low-boy tractor trailers. This configuration
22 would require that the speed limit be set at 15 MPH. Traffic calming would likely be
23 installed to ensure the reduced speeds. We will seek permission from the Federal Railroad
24 Administration to installation a silent crossing. This will necessitate the installation of
25

1 median barriers and crossing gates that fully block all four quadrants of the roadway to
2 prevent motorists from trying to “sneak through.”

3
4 **20. Are there any cost estimates for at-grade crossing?**

5 The cost for a silent at-grade crossing has been estimated at \$500,000.00.
6

7 **21. Can you contrast those estimates with cost estimates associated with an**
8 **above or below grade crossing?**

9 The cost of a grade separated crossing is estimated at \$15-20 million due to the extensive
10 amount of retaining walls and the likelihood of additional business relocations, including
11 the possible relocation of the Public Utility District #1 of Benton County electrical sub-
12 station.
13

14 **22. What is the distance of the next closest crossing of the UPRR lines that allow**
15 **north/south crossing of Union Pacific’s tracks.**

16 Edison Street is approximately 1.8 miles east of Center Parkway. Steptoe Street is
17 approximately 0.6 miles west of Center Parkway, but the UPRR tracks have been removed
18 at this location.
19

20 **23. Are there any other factors that impacted the decision to install an at-grade**
21 **crossing?**

22 Yes.
23
24
25

