



STATE OF WASHINGTON

UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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(360) 664-1160 • TTY (360) 586-8203

Mar. 28, 2018

Joseph P. Rutan, P.E.
County Engineer/Assistant Director
Whatcom County Public Works Dept.
322 N. Commercial Street, Suite 301
Bellingham, WA 98225-4042

**Re: TR-180234 – Notice of Intent to Establish a Railroad Quiet Zone at Cove Road
(USDOT #084795Y)**

Dear Mr. Rutan:

On Mar. 20, 2018, the Whatcom County Public Works Department (County) notified the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) of its intent to establish a railroad quiet zone at the Cove Road railroad crossing, identified as USDOT 084795Y.

The proposed quiet zone will be in effect 24 hours per day, seven days per week. While the notice provided did not specify length, UTC Staff (Staff) assumes that the proposed quiet zone will extend one-quarter mile on each side of the crossing, which is the minimum length required by Title 49, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 222.

The County utilized information in the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) grade crossing inventory to calculate the Quiet Zone Risk Index (QZRI). As the Cove Road crossing now stands, the QZRI for the quiet zone without train horns is 15,288.69, which exceeds the Nationwide Significant Risk Threshold of 14,723.

The County proposes to install a Supplemental Safety Measure (SSM) upgrade of 100 feet of mountable median with reflectorized channelization devices on the east approach to the crossing. On the west approach to the crossing, a nearby intersecting roadway prevents the County from installing more than 25 feet of mountable median with reflective traffic channelization. This upgrade qualifies as an Alternative Safety Measure (ASM) and will require approval from the FRA. Implementation of these safety measures lowers the overall QZRI below the risk threshold to 8,918.40.

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On Jan. 30, 2018, Staff participated in an onsite quiet zone review of the Cove Road crossing along with representatives from the County, the FRA, and BNSF Railway Company (BNSF). Staff supports the proposed SSM and ASM upgrades as they will reduce the possibility of motorists driving around downed crossing gates when a train is approaching.

Under current federal rules, the UTC may comment on quiet zones but it does not have the authority to approve or deny them. Staff acknowledges that this crossing will qualify for designation as a quiet zone with the SSM/ASM upgrades proposed by the County.

Prior to installing the median barriers, the County must submit a petition to the UTC to obtain approval for the crossing modifications. Staff also recommends that the County review the enclosed FRA publication, "*Guidance on the Use of Traffic Channelization Devices at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings*." The devices selected should meet all FRA requirements. When the quiet zone is implemented, "NO TRAIN HORN" signs must be added to the advance warning signs on each approach to the crossing.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Please contact Betty Young, Transportation Planning Specialist, at (360) 664-1202 or by email at betty.young@utc.wa.gov, if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Steven V. King
Executive Director and Secretary

Enclosure

cc: Jeffrey Stewart, Federal Railroad Administration
Federal Railroad Administration, Office of Safety, Washington DC
Megan McIntyre, BNSF
Stephen Semenick, BNSF
Kurt Laird, AMTRAK