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28 May, 2007

STATE OF WASH
UTIL. AND TRANSP
COMMISSION

Carole J. Washburn, Executive Secretary
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
PO Box 47250
1300 S. Evergreen Park Drive, SW
Olympia, WA 98504-7250

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WASH. UT. & TP. COMM

Dear Carole Washburn,

We are writing this letter in comment on the proposed closure of the Hickox Road railway crossing (US DOT #084737D). The petition has an assigned docket TR-070696.

We live approximately 1 mile from the proposed closure, on Dike Road. We are both physicians who provide obstetric care, attending, between us, about 50 deliveries per year. Our main concern with the closure is that the alternative routes for us to get to Skagit Valley Hospital involve either Stackpole, which adds 5 minutes to the route to the hospital, or Britt Slough then Blackburn, which adds 4-5 minutes over more congested roads. Deliveries are fraught with unpredictability and both of us have experienced deliveries in which those 4-5 minutes would have been important to patient care.

As you are aware, other concerns in our local community also argue against closure of the road, including:

- the inefficiencies added to the work of businesses and local residents that need access to Interstate 5 or to the overpass just to the west of Hickox's intersection with Old Highway 99. We seriously doubt that routing this traffic, particularly farm equipment, over the busy Conway overpass or the Blackburn crossing, is a viable alternative.
- the threat to timely arrival of emergency services to our neighborhood, since the closure would cut us off from Cedardale Fire Department.


We certainly understand the need to improve rail travel through the area and the financial need for a BNSF Railway to extend the pre-existing double track southward from the portion that currently runs parallel to Old Highway 99, rather than build a separate double track. We do, however, believe that the needs of the local community would be much better served by continued maintenance of the crossing gate at Hickox. Even if the closure of the gate becomes more frequent and prolonged, we will often be able to spot the closed gate from the Dike Road/Hickox Road intersection and then travel along alternate routes. When it is not closed, however, we will be able to arrive at the Skagit Valley Hospital more quickly, which is something that will benefit our patients.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



L. Sloane Winkes, M.D.



Ben M. Winkes, M.D.