

April 2, 2008

Paula J. Hammond
Transportation Secretary
Washington State Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 47316
Olympia, WA 98504-7316

RE: WSDOT I-405 Expansion and Wilburton Rail Crossing

Dear Secretary Hammond:

As you know, there is a vigorous debate underway—particularly in Eastside communities such as Newcastle—about the future of the BNSF rail line running from Renton to Snohomish. Like most communities along the corridor, we believe that the line holds great promise as a potential commuter rail line serving Eastside residents. We believe further that a trail component could safely co-exist with the rail line and enhance recreational opportunities for our citizens. Our sentiments on these issues have already been made known to the King County Executive's Office and other regional agencies.

The purpose of this letter, however, is to voice a concern about WSDOT's plans with regard to the expansion of I-405 in Bellevue and the plans for breaking the rail connection at the present location of the Wilburton Tunnel. Those plans, of course, have long been known. Only recently, though, has serious consideration been given to a potential regional commuter line along the full length of the corridor. As you may know, Sound Transit is strongly considering a regional commuter rail component—utilizing the existing BNSF corridor—as part of its planned Phase II ballot measure, tentatively scheduled for either 2008 or 2010.

Communities north of the Wilburton Tunnel stand to realize the benefits of such a commuter line immediately, since it travels through the heart of several job centers—particularly Bellevue, Kirkland and Woodinville. Our concern is that current WSDOT plans for I-405 fail to accommodate a rail connection at Wilburton, and threaten to leave residents in Newcastle and points south without a connection to the northern portion of the BNSF line. According to the WSDOT website, *"Future plans for the rail corridor are uncertain. WSDOT will consider future rail or pedestrian crossings, depending on funding and decisions about property use."*

It seems apparent to us that there is a growing coalition of Eastside communities, rail proponents, and trail advocates who support the dual-use option, combined with the recent interest of Sound

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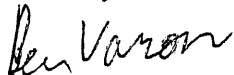
www.ci.newcastle.wa.us

Transit to utilizing the line for commuter train service. We encourage WSDOT to examine this issue and work with other regional agencies to develop a solution that works in the long term. Failure to incorporate a provision for rail south of Wilburton into the current I-405 expansion could cost taxpayers more in the long run and set back rail service on the southern portion of the BNSF line for many years.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. We trust you recognize the importance of preserving the rail connection for the future benefit of our residents and look forward to working with you to address this challenge.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ben Varon
Mayor, City of Newcastle

c.c. The Honorable Senator Brian Weinstein, Washington State Legislature
The Honorable Representative Judy Clibborn, Washington State Legislature
The Honorable Representative Fred Jarrett, Washington State Legislature
The Honorable Ron Sims, King County Executive
Deputy Mayor Dan Hubbell and Newcastle City Councilors
Craig Stone, Urban Corridors Director, WSDOT
Joni Earl, CEO, Sound Transit
Tay Yoshitani, Director, Port of Seattle