

City of

Mount
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Mayor

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February 27, 2009

The Honorable Rick Larsen
108 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: 6-Year Federal Highway Bill Reauthorization: Proposal for BNSF Skagit River Bridge Replacement

Dear Congressman Larsen,

The City of Mount Vernon requests your support to provide a contingent authorization for \$17.3 million to replace the BNSF Skagit River Bridge in the next 6-year federal highway reauthorization bill. Specifically, we request language in the reauthorization bill to *"Provide up to \$17.3 million to replace the Skagit River BNSF Bridge, provided BNSF and the state of Washington each contribute at least 1/3rd of the total project funding."*

All of the technical studies indicate that this bridge must be modified or replaced in order to reduce the risk of catastrophic flooding of the County's main urban areas and transportation corridors. We believe that a partnership project is the only viable mechanism.

The concept underlying this request is to provide an economic incentive for BNSF to enter a federal – state – local – BNSF partnership to replace the bridge. This proposal recognizes the public benefit of replacing the bridge to reduce flood risk to the urban areas of Skagit County and keep transportation arterials open during and after a large flood event. It requires BNSF to provide a third of the funding, but also provides a significant incentive for the railroad to do so. The proposal anticipates funding for the \$52 million bridge replacement project will be 1/3rd federal, 1/3rd state (similar to the recent state appropriation for the Chehalis / Lewis County area), and 1/3rd BNSF. Additionally, the adjacent levee setback work will be funded through local mechanisms already in place (Dike Districts 17 and 12 capital programs, and City of Burlington's Drainage Utility).

On February 17th of this month, local elected officials and staff met with area legislators and a BNSF representative to discuss this proposal. BNSF was noncommittal but willing to give serious consideration to replacing the bridge, should the federal and state contingent authorizations become available. My staff will continue to work with BNSF's technical engineering staff to refine the bridge replacement proposal. It may be possible to come up with a solution short of total bridge replacement, which would save money.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We recognize getting the money together to replace this bridge is a very difficult prospect, and forming a public-private partnership to replace private infrastructure will not be easy. Nevertheless, we think it may be the best solution, and the timing for the reauthorization bill is now. Please feel free to contact Esco Bell, my Public Works Director, at 360-336-6204 if you or your staff have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Bud Norris
Mayor