



Washington State Legislature

February 27, 2009

Senator Patty Murray
173 Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Maria Cantwell
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Rick Larsen
1529 Longworth House Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Partnership to Replace the BNSF Skagit River Bridge

Dear Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell, and Congressman Larsen,

Analysis provided in conjunction with the Bridge Modification and Interstate Highway Protection Project, (thank you for providing this funding, authorized under SAFETEA-LU) has confirmed that the BNSF Skagit River Bridge, constructed in 1916, is a hazard during Skagit River floods. Hydraulic modeling shows that during a large Skagit flood event, water surface levels will be above the bottom chords of the bridge girders, making an already dangerous condition of debris blockage, even worse. The bridge backs up water upstream to Sedro-Woolley (closing SR-20), increases the risk of catastrophic levee failure of the adjacent levees due to scouring, increases the risk of flooding Burlington and Mount Vernon, and increases the risk of flooding I-5. It goes without saying that the bridge itself is at serious risk of failure during a major Skagit flood event. It already failed during a 1995 flood and even now cannot be used by rail traffic during floods due to safety concerns. A recent study performed to determine the economic impact of the I-5 closure in the Chehalis area, indicates the economic loss if either the BNSF bridge or I-5 closes is \$8 million per day. If both are closed, \$16 million per day.

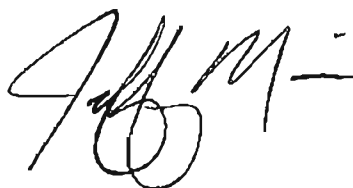
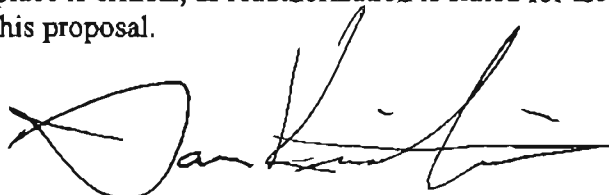
Replacing this bridge is important for at least four reasons: first, all of the technical studies indicate that this bridge must be modified or replaced in order to reduce the risk of catastrophic flooding of the County's main urban areas and transportation corridors. Second, studies indicate that freight and passenger traffic in this rail corridor will continue to grow, increasing regional, state and the national reliance on this bridge. Third, reliable rail facilities will facilitate movement of freight off of the crowded I-5, Highway 99, and SR-9 transportation systems to the rail corridor, resulting in a more fuel-efficient method to transport goods, less traffic congestion, and less air pollution. Finally, replacing the bridge will significantly improve the capability of the railroad to continue operations during a flood event, providing freight movement even when I-5, SR-9, and Highway 99 are closed. We believe that a partnership between federal, state, and local governments and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad is the only viable mechanism to achieve these goals.

On February 17, legislators and staff from the 10th, 39th, and 40th legislative districts, mayors and staff from Sedro-Woolley and Burlington, and a representative from BNSF met to discuss the possibility of forming a Federal – State – BNSF - Local partnership to replace this bridge to decrease the known flood risk it poses. The concept is: the Federal Government and the State of Washington will each authorize funding for 1/3rd of the estimated \$52 million cost of replacing the bridge, contingent on BNSF also contributing 1/3rd of the cost. The Federal Government would authorize this expenditure in the next Federal highway bill. The State

Legislature would authorize the expenditure in the 2011 - 2013 biennium. Local partners (Burlington, Dike District 12, Dike District 17) will provide the levee setback improvements necessary to tie the new bridge into the levee system. The decision to replace the bridge will then rest with BNSF. At the meeting, Terry Finn of BNSF stated that if the contingent funding is lined up, the railroad would give serious consideration to providing the last 1/3rd of the funding, thereby forming the public/private partnership.

The timing to get the Federal contingent authority in place is critical, as reauthorization is slated for the 111th Congress. We request the honor of your support for this proposal.

Sincerely,



Judy Clibborn

Don Quill

Norma Smith

Beverly Eaton


Paul E. Woodland

Mary Margaret Haugen

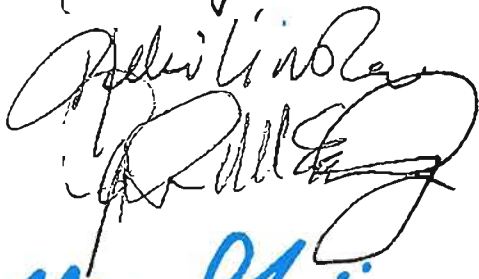
Bob Stevens

Jeanette Berkeley

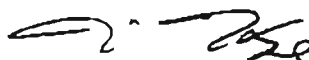
Alan R. Hobbs



Rosemary MacCubbin



Mike Sells



Rep. Kirk Pearson 39 th Legislative District	Rep. Dan Kristiansen 39 th Legislative District
Sen. Kevin Ranker 40 th Legislative District	Rep. Jeff Morris 40 th Legislative District
Rep. Judy Clibborn 41 th Legislative District	Rep. Dave Quall 40 th Legislative District
Rep. Norma Smith 10 th Legislative District	Rep. Barbara Bailey 10 th Legislative District
Sen. Dale Brandland 42 nd Legislative District	Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen 10 th Legislative District
Sen. Val Stevens 39 th Legislative District	Sen. Jean Berkey 38 th Legislative District
Sen. Steve Hobbs 44 th Legislative District	Sen. Paull Shin 21 st Legislative District
Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe 1 st Legislative District	Rep. Al O'Brien 1 st Legislative District
Rep. Kelli Linville 42 nd Legislative District	Rep. Mark Ericks 1 st Legislative District
Rep. John McCoy 38 th Legislative District	Rep. Mike Sells 38 th Legislative District
Rep. Marko Liias 21 st Legislative District	Rep. Mike Hope 44 th Legislative District