
Chapter Eight

Agency and Public Coordination

Final Environmental Impact Statement

Vancouver Rail Project

Public and agency outreach efforts in the Vancouver area began in late 1995 and continued through the summer of 2000. The first phase of outreach entailed public and agency scoping for this Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

What is Scoping?

Scoping is the first of three primary steps in the preparation of an environmental impact statement.¹ Scoping allows the public, tribes, and government agencies to identify the range of the issues related to a proposed project and the range of alternatives to be addressed in the EIS. Under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), the lead agency must offer opportunities for stakeholders and interested parties to offer their comments on the proposed project prior to commencement of the EIS process. These opportunities often take the form of formal public and agency scoping meetings, open houses, and informational newsletters.

What were the results of scoping for the Vancouver Rail Project?

Scoping for the Washington state portion of the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor EIS began in December 1995. Scoping notices related to this project are presented in **Appendix G** of this document. A series of open houses and presentations to targeted groups were scheduled along the corridor in January and February 1996. One of 20 such meetings along the corridor was scheduled for Vancouver, WA, during this time but was cancelled due to severe weather and flooding in the area. Additional outreach efforts were used to reach the Vancouver community. These efforts included paid ads, media coverage, speaker's bureau presentations, and newsletter mailings.

In addition, a representative of the City of Vancouver participated in an agency scoping meeting held for Southwest Washington on May 21, 1996.

Through these scoping outreach efforts, Clark County residents indicated they wanted additional train service (to Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver, BC). They also indicated a desire for upgrades in the following train operations:

- Crossing safety,
- Grade separation,
- Noise,
- Potential stops in the county, and
- Faster travel times.

¹The remaining two are preparation of a Draft EIS and completion of a Final EIS and Record of Decision.

Were other meetings held in Vancouver?

In 1999, the WSDOT Rail Office, with concurrence by the Federal Highway Administration, decided to prepare environmental documentation for specific projects rather than for the corridor as a whole. It was further decided that the **Vancouver Rail Project** would be the first to undergo detailed environmental analysis.

By November 1999, based on input from a meeting sponsored by the City of Vancouver, the Rail Office, in cooperation with The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF), determined to combine two formerly separate actions – the proposed Vancouver Yard By-Pass Tracks and the proposed closure of the West 39th Street at-grade crossing – and to address both in a single Draft EIS. Following this meeting, the project team convened a group of local neighborhood and agency representatives to help steer development of preliminary alternatives for the **Vancouver Rail Project**. This group of individuals, the Community Resource Team (CRT), came together in January 2000.

Who was part of the Community Resource Team and what was the Team's charge?

A Community Resource Team (CRT) was created for the **Vancouver Rail Project** to work with the project team to develop and shape a set of recommended alternatives to be analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The CRT consisted of 20 individuals representing 18 community and regional interests. Members of the CRT included the following representatives and entities:

- Chamber of Commerce, Steve Dearborn
- City of Vancouver, Pat McDonnell
- Clark County, Steve Schulte
- Columbia River Economic Development Council, Patrick Greene
- Local businesses:
 - AMR Northwest, Sean Brinkley
 - Healthtek Medical, Suzanne Roberti
 - HK Properties, Pat Kuzmer
- Neighborhoods:
 - Carter Park, Laura Reichardt
 - Fruit Valley, Candi Thulin
 - Hazel Dell, Duane Baird
 - Hough, Julie Garver
 - Lincoln, Paul Allais/Dave Howard
 - Northwest, Marilyn Koenninger
- Planning Commission, Jeanne Stewart
- Port of Vancouver, Walt Morey
- Regional Transportation Council, Dean Lookingbill
- Vancouver Housing Authority, Dianne Stites
- Vancouver School District

In addition to the CRT members, a technical advisory team was also established. Technical advisory team members also participated in the CRT meetings, discussions, and decisions. Advisory team members included:

City of Vancouver

- Pat McDonnell – Deputy City Manager
- Azam Babar – Long Term Planning
- Thayer Rorabaugh – Transportation Manager
- Jon Wagner – Planning
- Matt Ransom – Transportation Planning
- Don Bivens – Interim Fire Chief
- Lt. Bruce Hall – Police Services

The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company

- Mike Cowles – BNSF Representative
- Steve Mills – BNSF Representative

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration

- Deborah Spurgeon – Railroad Safety Inspector
- Darryl Morrow – Rail Safety

WSDOT project team members also served on the technical advisory team.

How did the CRT carry out its work?

This group, whose meetings were open to the public, met seven times between January 19 and June 21, 2000. Meetings were held in the evenings and typically lasted two hours. Dates of the meetings were as follows: January 19, February 16, March 15, April 19, May 17, June 7, and June 21.

The agendas for CRT meetings included the following topics and issues:

January 19, 2000

- Roles and responsibilities of the CRT
- The steps in the environmental review process
- Project schedule
- Background of the **Vancouver Rail Project**, including information about the State’s passenger rail program and Vancouver rail yard operations
- Review of issues identified relative to the proposed West 39th Street at-grade closure
- Addition of bypass tracks to the Vancouver yard
- Next steps

February 16, 2000

- Discussion of the purpose and need for the **Vancouver Rail Project** in the environmental review process
- Further discussion about the role and responsibilities of the CRT
- Initial discussion of evaluation criteria

March 15, 2000

- Invitation to a **Vancouver Rail Project** open house (March 29, 2000)
- Report by City of Vancouver Transportation Services on proposed Fruit Valley Road Improvements
- Report from the Vancouver School District concerning a proposed Fruit Valley Community Learning Center
- Review and agreement on evaluation criteria

April 19, 2000

- Site visit to West 39th Street at-grade crossing prior to the scheduled CRT meeting
- Workshop to enable CRT members to identify pros and cons of alternatives that had been identified (Technical resource people were available at each table to facilitate discussion.)

May 17, 2000

- Workshop on alternatives continued

June 7, 2000

- Report on funding options to make improvements for the **Vancouver Rail Project**
- Report of the results of the West 39th Street Rail Crossing Transportation Analysis
- Review of workshop results on the alternatives and elimination of two alternatives

June 21, 2000

- Review and final agreement on alternatives to be considered in the Draft EIS
- Review of next steps in the preparation of the Draft EIS and an approximate schedule
- Appreciations to the CRT by the project team

What alternatives did the CRT recommend for consideration in the Draft EIS?

The alternatives the CRT recommended for consideration in the Draft EIS (with the designations used by the CRT) were as follows:

- Alternative A. No Action (required by the National Environmental Policy Act)
- Alternative B. Easterly Bypass with the following options:
 - Close the 39th Street Crossing
 - Construct a vehicular overpass and close the old crossing
 - Construct a pedestrian/bicycle overpass and close the old crossing
- Alternative I. Westerly Bypass with the following options:
 - Close the 39th Street Crossing
 - Construct a vehicular overpass and close the old crossing
 - Construct a pedestrian/bicycle overpass and close the old crossing

What were the results of the March 2000 Open House?

On March 29, 2000 the project team and the CRT sponsored a public open house at Hudson's Bay High School, from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Forty-one people attended the open house. The purpose of the meeting was to let the community review the alternatives under consideration and to give feedback to the CRT and the project team. A summary of the comments about each alternative from the open house was provided to the CRT.

What other outreach approaches were used to keep people informed, January 2000 to January 2002?

Project Newsletters: To keep the community and interested citizens informed about the project, newsletters were mailed to more than 3,500 residents in the vicinity of the Vancouver rail yard in March 2000 and again in August 2000. The December 2001 Rail Connection, which included an update about the project, was also mailed to everyone on the project mailing list.

Internet: Information about the project was available at www.wsdot.wa.gov/pubtran/passrail/vancouver/. The website was updated periodically with new project and schedule information.



Project notebooks: To keep the community informed, these were placed at the five locations below where citizens could see materials provided to the CRT and review meeting summaries:

- City of Vancouver Office of Neighborhoods (located at City Hall)
- Vancouver Community Library (Downtown)
- Battle Ground Library
- Westfield Shoppingtown Library (formerly known as the Vancouver Mall Library)
- Cascade Park Library
- When was the Draft EIS issued?

The Draft EIS was issued on February 8, 2002. The formal public comment period began on February 11 and ended on March 27.

How were people notified about the issuance of the Draft EIS and their opportunities to comment?

The following approaches were used to notify interested citizens about their opportunities to review and offer their comments on the Draft EIS:

- Letters were sent to members of the CRT, along with copies of the Draft EIS, encouraging them to provide their comments during the comment period, either at the March 6 public hearing or in writing (by U.S. mail, e-mail, or fax).
- A press release, announcing the availability of the Draft EIS, was issued on February 8, 2002. A second press release inviting people to the March 6 public hearing on the Draft EIS was issued on March 1, 2002.
- A paid ad was placed in *The Columbian* on February 6 to announce the Draft EIS release and the March 6 public hearing.
- Project newsletters were mailed at the beginning of the public comment period to approximately 3500 individuals and families on the project mailing list. The newsletters described the process and invited people to provide their comments on the Draft EIS; listed locations where they could review copies of the Draft EIS and indicated how they could request their own copies; reported the key findings in the Draft EIS; and invited people to attend the public hearing on March 6.
- The project website (www.wsdot.wa.gov/pubtran/passrail/vancouver/) was updated with information about the availability of the Draft EIS and opportunities to offer comments (in writing and in person).
- Briefings were provided in advance of the March 6 public hearing, as follows:
 - The Vancouver City Council received a briefing at the Council’s February 25 meeting; the briefing was videotaped and available for rebroadcast on the public access channel.
 - The Vancouver Planning Commission received a briefing on February 26.
 - The Lincoln Neighborhood Association received a briefing on February 28.
- Additional media coverage:
 - An op ed column appeared on February 25 in Vancouver’s daily paper, *The Columbian*, written by Tom Koenninger, editor emeritus; Mr. Koenninger’s wife was a member of the CRT.
 - A story ran in the February 25 edition of *The Columbian* entitled, "Rail yard expansion could close crossing, level homes."
 - A story ran in the March 7 edition of *The Columbian*, entitled, "39th Street Crossing Plan Scrutinized."

When and where was the public hearing held on the Draft EIS?

A public hearing was held at Hudson's Bay High School in the Commons Area on Wednesday, March 6, 2002, from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The hearing was conducted as an open house, giving people a chance to review the alternatives and to talk one-on-one with project staff before giving their comments to a court reporter or filling out a comment sheet. Twenty-eight people attended the public hearing.

How many public comments were received?

During the course of the public hearing, twelve individuals made a public statement. Their statements can be read in the public hearing transcript presented in **Appendix H**. In addition to these verbal comments, numerous residents and interested citizens e-mailed or mailed in their comments on the **Vancouver Rail Project**. In total, 63 written comments were received. Of these comments, eleven were from local, regional, state and federal agencies. These comments, and the project team's response to them, are presented in **Appendix G** of this document. Throughout this document, information has been updated to reflect these concerns and comments.

Will WSDOT continue to work with the Vancouver community and local agencies once this environmental document is completed?

If funding is provided for implementation of this project, the WSDOT project team commits to working with the local Vancouver community and agencies during final design and mitigation development. In addition, just prior to and during construction the project team will continually inform the community and local agencies of construction schedule and sequencing. Information will be disseminated through WSDOT's website, newspaper articles, and agency coordination.

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