



Corporate Report

NO: R220

COUNCIL DATE: October 30, 2006

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: October 25, 2006
FROM: General Manager, Engineering Fire Chief FILE: 8710-20 (BNR)
SUBJECT: Semiahmoo Peninsula Citizens for Public Safety (SPCPS)
(Relocation of BNSF Tracks)

RECOMMENDATION

The Engineering Department and the Fire Chief recommend that Council:

1. Support, in principle, the concept of the relocation of the tracks away from the oceanfront provided it is entirely funded by others and subject to appropriate public consultation; and
2. Authorize the City Clerk to forward a copy of this report to Mr. Paul LeMay, who appeared before Council on behalf of SPCPS.

INTENT

To respond to the delegation, Mr. Paul LeMay of SPCPS regarding the relocation of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) tracks from White Rock, Ocean Park, and Crescent Beach area.

BACKGROUND

Mr. LeMay appeared as a delegation at Council-in-Committee on April 3, 2006. Mr. LeMay's prime argument is that the BNSF rail tracks around the base of the Ocean Park and White Rock bluffs, and crossing the only two access points to Crescent Beach, present a hazard to the area due to the potential for a derailment of a train containing dangerous goods. The potential hazard is to both the residents of the area as well as the shoreline and marine environment.

The City is not in a position to assess the degree of risk that exists due to the BNSF tracks. This rail line, including the Mud Bay trestle, is Federally regulated and it is the responsibility of the Federal Government to regulate the safety of this rail line.

While unable to comment on the exact degree of risk posed by these tracks, it is possible to say that if the tracks are relocated, then the risk, albeit at reduced level, will be transferred to an alternative alignment. However, the risks associated with landslides and spillage directly into Boundary Bay could be largely eliminated.

Track relocation would provide the potential for a premier pathway along the waterfront. However, as identified by the delegation, there are slope stability issues. BNSF monitors this and undertakes stabilization works regularly to avoid any major slides. If the railway were relocated, this responsibility would shift to the City of Surrey. However, considering the benefits from the improved access to Boundary Bay; and likely, improved safety situation, the relocation of the tracks, subject to appropriate public consultation and mitigations of impacts elsewhere, could be positive for Surrey. Consequently, staff are proposing that Council support, in principle, the concept of track relocation away from the ocean front provided it is entirely funded by the responsible agencies.

Previous Alignment Studies

In 1995, the Washington State Department of Transportation undertook a survey of alignments to reroute the tracks away from the oceanfront. This study was undertaken by the Morrison Knudson Corporation to identify alignments and improvements that, if implemented, would result in more frequent, reliable passenger rail service. Two alignments were identified and are shown on the attached sketch. The route along Highway 99 (Route A) requires a section of tunnel to reduce the gradient for freight trains. Route B is a surface line on the alignment of 180 Street with a diversion around the base of the hill between 16 Avenue and 36 Avenue.

In 2002, the City retained Delcan to investigate the relocation of rail tracks as part of a new highway connection from Highway 10 to the Border. This location is also on 180 Street with a diversion over to 188 Street north of the hill, and is identified on the attached sketch. The preliminary estimated order of costs (2006 value estimates) of these various alignments are as follows:

	Estimated Cost (2006 \$)
Hwy. 99 Route (1995 study)	\$450,000,000
180 Street Route (1995 Study)	\$250,000,000
180 Street /188 Street Route (2002 Study)	\$150,000,000

Action to Date

In spite of the previous studies, no Federal, State, Provincial or Rail company funding has been made available for any relocation of the tracks. At this time, staff has no knowledge of any funding proposals for any such relocations.

Impacts on Other Areas

All of the relocation options would have significant impacts on adjacent areas where the new track has to be located, with the Hwy. 99 alignment having the least corridor space for environmental and other mitigation. The 180 Street and the 180 Street/188 Street alignments would also have the impact of additional train traffic on the existing tracks along Colebrook Road about which we already receive complaints. Consequently, an extensive program of public consultation and mitigation of impacts would be required to establish a new alignment to relocate the tracks away from the ocean front.

Emergency Response Issues

The City represented by the Surrey Fire Department and the Engineering Department have met with both the Semiahmoo Peninsula's Citizens for Public Safety (SPCPS) and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) on separate occasions.

Background

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation data for 2001, more than 1.7 million carloads of hazardous materials are transported by rail each year and 99.996% of all rail HAZMAT shipments reach their final destination without a release caused by an accident.

The safety record for HAZMAT shipments on rail is far better than the comparable record for truck transportation.

During our meeting with BNSF they advised they have received the 2003 and 2005 National Transportation Community Awareness and Emergency Response (TRANSCAER) award for rail safety and its training and exercises. TRANSCAER is a voluntary national outreach initiative that assists communities prepare for and respond to a possible hazardous material transportation incident.

BNSF has more than 160 trained and well equipped emergency responders to help insure that personnel are available to assist if an incident occurs, regardless of location.

The railway representative outlined the following safety measures and standards BNSF meets in the operation of the railway.

- ❑ They meet and comply with all the national rail safety standards put forward by Transport Canada
- ❑ They are audited by Transport Canada twice yearly
- ❑ They conduct a physical patrol of the rail line 4 times per week
- ❑ They have electronic monitoring in place to detect any slope movement, which in turn gives a preemptive warning to stop train traffic along this corridor.
- ❑ They have had a geo-technical risk assessment completed
- ❑ Rail car design and construction has improved considerably to prevent catastrophic failure in the event of an accident

Public Notification and Proposed Siren System

The SPCPS has proposed that a system of sirens be established that would sound if there was a derailment of dangerous goods requiring the evacuation of areas within 5 km of the tracks, they also indicated BNSF would provide some or all the funding. The rail representative did not substantiate this.

At this time the Fire Department does not recommend a siren system. The main disadvantage of a siren system is that not all people will know what the siren would represent in terms of an action required and, therefore, may cause confusion or compound the problem by having people move in a direction that would be in the hazard area or in effect towards the incident.

City staff has outlined the concerns to SPCPS with a siren system.

Alternately, controlled emergency evacuation procedures have been proven to be more effective. Where a public notification in the case of an evacuation is required, the Public Information Officer would prepare a media statement for public broadcast on local stations, and the responding agencies would plan for a systematic evacuation of the area affected.

This would be accomplished by door to door visits by the Police, Fire Department, Search and Rescue teams or speaker trucks with public announcement systems informing people as to where they are to relocate and which direction is safe for travel.

Capability of Surrey's Fire Service

The City of Surrey Emergency Response and Recovery Plan outlines the City's response to Rail Accidents and Dangerous Goods Incidents.

The Surrey Fire Service Training Division routinely conducts joint training sessions with first response agencies and industry, including rail companies, local fire departments, Surrey Fire Service HAZMAT Team, Vancouver Fire Department HAZMAT Team, fire dispatch personnel and private HAZMAT response teams.

Annually workshops are conducted in Incident Command and EOC operation with the City Department Managers. The tabletop planning exercises involve rail accidents.

The Surrey Fire Services Hazmat Technicians course includes a HAZMAT rail incident tabletop exercise followed by a rail car tank sealing exercise at the Justice Institute training facility.

The Surrey Fire service is an associate member of TRANSCAER and on occasion hosts meetings where there is the opportunity to network and share ideas with representatives from the rail industry

Next Steps

The cost to relocate the BNR tracks away from the ocean front is estimated in the range of \$100 million to \$400 million. Such a cost is far beyond the City of Surrey's ability to fund and the relocation for the purposes of improved rail track safety is beyond Surrey's area of responsibility. Clearly, this responsibility rests with the BNR and the Federal Government.

Transport Canada is the regulatory agency for the rail industry and BNSF complies with all regulations set forward. BNSF is also very proactive in operational safety measures and has a proven safety record.

The City is not in the transport regulatory business and given the standards set by Transport Canada and the BNSF Railway's safety record, the City is satisfied that it is equipped and prepared to deal with its role and responsibilities and incidents that may arise. Further discussions regarding rail relocation should be referred to the BNSF Railway and the appropriate senior government department.



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PH:LG/brb:rdd
Attachment