



CITY OF KIRKLAND

Department of Public Works

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To: Dave Ramsay, City Manager

From: David Godfrey, P.E., Transportation Engineering Manager

Date: August 21, 2008

Subject: BNSF CORRIDOR PROCESS

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council review the following information.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

At their August 5 meeting, Council requested a report about the Port of Seattle's acquisition of the BNSF eastside right-of-way. The City's website now includes a page with information on most of the key elements of the project and it also includes links to other sites. The following material is excerpted from the web page www.ci.kirkland.wa.us/eastsiderail :

The City of Kirkland continues to monitor the land acquisition deal among the [Port of Seattle](#) (Port), [BNSF Railway Company](#) (BNSF) and [King County](#) which is now in its final stages. The eastside rail corridor is 42-miles long and stretches from the City of Renton to the City of Snohomish, including a spur from Woodinville to Redmond. The corridor passes through the City of Kirkland from [Houghton to Totem Lake mostly west of I-405](#).

Port of Seattle & Burlington Northern Railway Company

The deal is expected to become final in late 2008 after approval from the federal [Surface Transportation Board](#). The rail corridor within Kirkland city limits is still currently used by BNSF for occasional freight rail traffic. After the deal is finalized, rail traffic is expected to stop south of Woodinville, at least until a Regional Public Process is completed (see below). The northern portion of the corridor between [Snohomish and Woodinville](#) will continue to be used for freight service and possibly excursion service. South of Woodinville, the corridor will be rail-banked, meaning that the corridor will have a public trail in the interim to preserve the corridor in the event future freight uses are necessary. Rail-banking does not require nor prohibit removal of the tracks, and permits non-freight rail uses consistent with the public trail.

Port of Seattle & King County

At the same time that the Port and BNSF signed an agreement to sell the corridor to the Port, the Port and King County (County) have signed an agreement that allows the County to develop the 32 miles of the corridor south of Woodinville as a trail. The Port and County will engage in a Regional Public Process to determine how the trail should be developed and whether or not rail should be present in the short term. The public process will give residents of the region (including Kirkland city residents) a chance to provide their ideas on the uses the corridor should have.

Puget Sound Regional Council & Sound Transit Rail Feasibility Study

Last year the State Legislature passed [HB 3224](#) directing the [Puget Sound Regional Council](#) (PSRC) and [Sound Transit](#) to conduct a rail feasibility study. It will include a survey of existing studies and, as necessary, new work to evaluate the feasibility of commuter rail service between eastern Snohomish county and eastern King county. A report on the results will be provided to the transportation committees of the House of Representatives and Senate by February 1, 2009. Some preliminary ridership forecasts should be available this summer.

Sound Transit

On July 24, 2008 the Sound Transit Board voted to place a [proposal](#) on the Fall 2008 ballot. The proposal does not include any funds to operate passenger rail service on the Eastside Rail Corridor. It does include a maximum contribution of \$50 million which may be used for engineering and design, and for the purchase of capital equipment and real estate that can either be sold or used on Sound Transit's existing transportation system. Sound Transit's investment is contingent upon three conditions being met prior to December 31, 2011.

1. Completion of the Sound Transit/PSRC feasibility study and determination that passenger rail on the Eastside BNSF corridor is feasible and would be a meaningful component of the region's future transportation system, as required by state law;
2. The Sound Transit Board's determination that the ridership forecasts, financing plan, and capital and operating cost estimates and operating plan are reasonable and that the service will provide substantial benefits to the regional transportation system in the Sound Transit District; and
3. Execution of an agreement with other public or private parties regarding the implementation of a passenger rail system.
4. If a partnership for passenger rail on the Eastside BNSF is not executed by December 31, 2011, the \$50 million in ST2 plan for a partnership will be reprogrammed to further implementation of BRT service on the I-405 corridor.

The [Kirkland City Council](#) has supported efforts to complete these agreements as it believes the corridor could provide a valuable recreation and transportation amenity. The Council has taken the following position on the corridor:

"The City of Kirkland has long looked upon the BNSF right-of-way as primarily a facility for non-motorized travel. However, we are also interested in an investigation of how rail transport might function alongside a trail. There are a number of unanswered questions concerning rail operations including impact on residential neighborhoods and local street traffic, ridership potential, parking accommodation and station locations."

Transportation issues are of great interest to Kirkland residents. To stay informed, please log on to the [Port of Seattle](#) website and subscribe to receive updates.