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SUBJECT: BURLINGTON NORTHERN SANTA FE (BNSF) CORRIDOR IN EAST KING COUNTY: DRAFT INTEREST STATEMENT

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POLICY ISSUE: For several years, Council has communicated a strong interest in having the BNSF Eastside rail corridor preserved for future transportation purposes. The corridor was recently purchased for public benefit and Council continues to play a role in shaping the future uses of the corridor. Last month (May 24), Council was provided an overview of the public benefit opportunities associated with this corridor recently coming into public ownership. Council directed staff to come back with an Interest Statement to help clarify Council's interests going forward. On June 28, staff will provide a Draft Interest Statement to Council that seeks to capture last month's discussion (**Attachment 1**).

**DIRECTION
NEEDED FROM
COUNCIL:**

Council will have an opportunity to discuss, modify and consider adoption of a Draft BNSF Implementation Interest Statement, a complement to Council's original BNSF Interest Statement adopted in June 2006 (**Attachment 2**).

BACKGROUND:

Project History

The BNSF's rail corridor includes approximately 42 miles of rail corridor segments that extend from the northern vicinity of Gene Coulon Memorial Beach Park in Renton to the City of Snohomish (this includes an 8 mile spur from Woodinville to Redmond).

In late 2003, the BNSF Railway indicated to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) that its economic review of trends and freight activity along a regional rail corridor it owns in east King and south Snohomish counties showed marginal and declining value to the railroad. The BNSF indicated that they were considering divesting of their interest in this particular rail corridor and asked if the region would like to consider acquiring the rail corridor rights-of-way to keep it available for transportation uses. In June 2004 PSRC's Executive Board unanimously agreed that this regional rail corridor should be preserved for any number of

transportation uses and took an action to communicate to the BNSF that the region was interested in working with it to explore the costs and implications of acquiring the corridor.

In July 2006, the Bellevue Council took action on a BNSF Interest Statement that has assisted in guiding the discussions to date (Attachment 2).

In November 2008, voters approved Sound Transit's ST2 package which includes a \$50 million capital fund for a potential BNSF commuter rail partnership that must be ratified by the end of 2011 or the funds will be reallocated to bus operations along I-405. Sound Transit is to consider release of a Request for Proposals in late summer to solicit partnerships for passenger rail to determine if there is a viable partner to provide such service in the corridor, with a final assessment and recommendation coming to the Board in summer 2011. It is unclear how Sound Transit's process and that of the forthcoming County planning process will be coordinated and sequenced.

In December 2009, the Port of Seattle purchased the corridor from BNSF. At the same time, King County purchased a trail easement for \$1.9 million to preserve the rail banked status of the corridor. The Port's purchase was based upon partner acquisition commitments among several organizations per a Memorandum of Understanding: King County, Port of Seattle, Sound Transit, City of Redmond, Puget Sound Energy and Cascade Water Alliance. King County's share of the purchase agreement represents approximately one-third of the corridor's full value.

Next Steps

Based on input from Council, staff will update the June 2006 Interest Statement for Council review and approval. This updated statement will serve to guide the City's participation in the upcoming process for establishing the future use of the corridor.

ALTERNATIVES:

- (1) Consider Draft Interest Statement with modification for action.
- (2) Defer action on Draft Interest Statement

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends alternative 1.

ATTACHMENTS:

- (1) *DRAFT* BNSF Implementation Interest Statement
- (2) June 2006 BNSF Interest Statement
- (3) BNSF Schedule

DRAFT
Interest Statement concerning
Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Corridor Implementation

Last Revised: June 28, 2010

The City of Bellevue supports regional efforts to secure East King County's BNSF Corridor for future public use and benefit. The City continues to support preserving this important public right-of-way for dual public uses: for a regional trail system and commuter rail or other transportation purposes. This approach is consistent with regional policy as adopted by the Puget Sound Regional Council and King County. The Bellevue Council supports the following principles for future corridor design and implementation processes within the King County segment of the corridor:¹

1. **Develop a Corridor Vision & Effective Governance Structure.** The region should develop a long-term vision for the development of the BNSF corridor to guide the near and long term use and identify actions and financial resources to support that vision. BNSF partnership representatives should define clear roles and responsibilities for the management and operation of the corridor and ensure all efforts going forward are marked by a timely process with meaningful engagement for cities along the corridor, comprehensive public outreach and transparent decision-making.
2. **Implement Dual Use.** The region should advance a planning process that includes a regional trail and compatible planning effort for commuter rail or other transportation use along on this valuable public right-of-way. Bellevue does not support a single trail use only: this corridor is a necessary component for the Eastside's increasingly multimodal transportation network essential to support Eastside and Bellevue growth.
3. **Advance Design and Phasing Plan in Timely Fashion.** All affected intersections and interchanges along the corridor within affected cities should be carefully analyzed, planned and phased, especially where there are competing interests for highly constrained right-of-way. Bellevue has a number of key interchanges that intersect with the BNSF right-of-way where improvements are being considered for future city roadway capacity and land use development. Sound Transit's East Link project and WSDOT future highway expansion also overlaps with the BNSF corridor within downtown Bellevue. The BNSF design process must be fully integrated with city, state and regional projects. Integrated planning efforts should ensure adequate public access points along the corridor.
4. **Ensure Planning Consistency & Innovation.** Relevant regional and local transportation plans, including those developed by the Puget Sound Regional Council (VISION 2040 and Transportation 2040), Sound Transit (ST2 and Long Range Plan) and city Comprehensive Plans should be updated to reflect new BNSF analysis. Implementation plans should be highly creative and utilize value engineering, opportunities for joint uses adjacent or near the corridor and planning activities that would be most likely to lead to synergistic opportunities.
5. **Develop a Complementary Financial Plan.** BNSF partners should seek additional funding from a range of funding opportunities including state, federal and private organizations for both capital and operating needs. Innovative finance methods should rely on national best practices and cost effectiveness.

¹ There are currently six partners as part of the non-binding Memorandum of Understanding for the purchase agreement of the BNSF Corridor: Port of Seattle, King County, Cascade Water Alliance, Sound Transit, City of Redmond and Puget Sound Energy (PSE).



**CITY OF BELLEVUE INTEREST STATEMENT:
BURLINGTON NORTHERN SANTA FE (BNSF)
CORRIDOR PRESERVATION PROJECT**

Revised July 17, 2006

Background

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is the lead agency on a regional corridor study to examine the potential opportunities and implications for the region to acquire and preserve in public ownership nearly 42 railway miles in the rail corridor now owned and operated by the BNSF Railway Company in east King and south Snohomish counties between cities of Renton and Snohomish. Concurrently, King County is negotiating with BNSF Railway Company to purchase the corridor.

The Advisory Committee is considering three action alternative for detailed evaluation concerning near-term public use and benefit:

- (1) Regional Trail [only];
- (2) Trail plus Current Freight Rail (includes dinner train); and,
- (3) Trail plus Redundant/Upgraded Freight Rail.

Study recommendations are to be considered by PSRC's policy boards in 2006 and 2007 and will be similarly incorporated into PSRC's regional transportation plan, Destination 2030, in 2007.

Bellevue's BNSF Preservation Guiding Principles

1. ***Public Benefit Opportunity:*** The Region should take advantage of this timely and rare opportunity to secure the 42-mile BNSF right-of-way that is currently being abandoned by BNSF for possible future public benefit. The region should carefully evaluate immediate, mid-term and long-term public uses of this right-of-way, including transit options in the longer-term.
2. ***Support Public Accountability and Outreach Efforts:*** Purchase and preservation of the corridor must be grounded in solid financial and public benefit evaluation and meaningful public involvement.
3. ***Ensure Local Plan Consistency:*** Should the right-of-way be preserved and a new use be identified, it will be critical that all local and regional plans be closely coordinated to ensure timely and efficient project implementation. For example, preservation plans should be consistent with Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan, specifically, policies supporting integrated trail systems, neighborhood preservation and urban design. Any future uses should also reflect and be consistent with I-405 Corridor FEIS Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan in so far each provided direction related to future acquisition of the corridor . Finally, any future acquisition and improvements should be considered

for inclusion into the federally required Metropolitan Transportation Plan as prepared and routinely updated by the Puget Sound Regional Council.

4. **Ensure Integrated Benefits:** Future improvement of the BNSF corridor through Bellevue should be carefully integrated with redevelopment plans as part of the Bel-Red Corridor Study, related park improvement opportunities and any other affected properties in Bellevue that might benefit from improvements to/surrounding the BNSF right-of-way.
5. **Support Ongoing Regional Collaboration:** Coordination among all regional stakeholders must be sustained (WSDOT, PSRC, King County, Cities along the BNSF Corridor, Sound Transit).

Principles for Evaluating Future Right-of-Way Use Alternatives

Each of the alternatives for future use of the BNSF should evaluate the following key criteria: Project costs (and cost refinements), economic and recreational benefits, community acceptance, public safety, trail connectivity, public liability and mitigation of any dual use conflicts.

Bellevue also supports the following specific direction with regard to each of the three action alternatives. Regardless of which alternative is selected for the short-term, the City's interest is to maintain potential public use of the right-of-way to include transit options for the longer term.

1. **Alternative 1 Trail Only:** The study team should further assess community impacts, planning level cost refinement, economic benefit and connectivity opportunities in Bellevue's jurisdiction. This trail only alternative would preclude any near-term shared use with rail and is considered a baseline assumption for other alternatives currently going forward (alternatives 2, 3).
2. **Alternative 2 Trail with Current Rail:** The study team should further assess community impacts, costs, economic benefit, trail connectivity opportunities, shared right-of-way challenges (shared trail/rail separated by barrier) and liability issues associated with dual use.
3. **Alternative 3: Trail with Increased [Freight] Rail:** This alternative would build on Alternative 1 and 2 and add a redundant north-south freight route between Seattle and Everett for emergency, bypass/back-up use. This alternative should be evaluated for preservation use only, rail and/or another public use related to I-405 Master Plan corridor needs. The study team should carefully evaluate current and future freight needs and should consider preservation of the redundant segment for rail-banking purposes only.

BNSF Corridor Activities Schedule

Activities	Organization	2010/2011	2012/2013
Regional Planning Process	<i>King County & Sound Transit</i>	-Planning process kicks off in late 2010 and continues throughout 2011	-Planning with affected cities continues
ST2 Request for Proposal on Commuter Rail Interest	<i>Sound Transit</i>	-ST Board seeks RFP late in 2010 with analysis completed summer to fall 2011 -Allocation deadline for potential commuter rail partner end of 2011	
Parks Levy Vote	<i>King County</i>	-Vote could occur for BNSF trail funding	-Vote could occur for BNSF trail funding