

Spokane area details

Coal train routings from Powder River Basin to Pacific coast ports:

The BNSF rail line through Spokane is a major, but not an exclusive, route between the above points. The Union Pacific railroad also serves the Powder River Basin and Pacific coast ports. Their line passes through Southern Idaho, eastern and northern Oregon to Portland. UP lines through Spokane will not be handling coal trains.

Contracts for the hauling of coal are put out for competitive bidding. BNSF and UP actively compete with each other for this business. While it is possible that either BNSF or UP could end up hauling all of the coal to Pacific coast ports, the more likely result is that both railroads will be handling some of this coal traffic.

Grade crossings

Spokane is very fortunate in that our forefathers elevated the rail line through downtown Spokane in 1915 on a wide viaduct. As a result, trains pass effortlessly and almost unnoticed through downtown Spokane. The closest at grade crossing east of Spokane proper is Park Road in the valley. The next grade crossing to the west, on the route likely to be used by coal trains, is Anderson road, about a mile west of Cheney.

The viaduct is wide enough, and train speeds through downtown Spokane are slow enough that any derailment that might occur will be contained on the viaduct. Since 1915 there has never been a train derailment on this viaduct that affected downtown Spokane.

Spokane Valley is a different story. There are at grade crossings at Park, Vista, University, Pines, Flora, Harvard, and McKenzie roads – 7 total. High traffic volume crossings such as Argonne Rd and Sullivan Rd are already grade separated. West of Park Rd, bridges cross the BNSF at Fancher, Havana, and Freya streets.

“Bridging the Valley” is a long term project to grade separate some crossings and close others. Unfortunately (In my opinion) their first project was to bridge Havana St instead of Pines Rd. Havana St was closed for over 2 years during construction of the bridge and nobody missed it! The bridge is beautiful but would have been more appropriate at Pines Rd. For details, check their web site at: <http://www.srtc.org/btv.html>

Emissions from diesel locomotives

Great strides have been made in recent years in reducing the emissions from diesel locomotives. All coal trains will be powered by newer locomotives which meet these current higher emissions standards.

The majority of locomotives are constructed by General Electric Transportation Systems in Erie PA. Here is an excerpt from their web site at

<http://www.getransportation.com/rail/rail-products/locomotives/evolutionr-series-locomotive.html>

The Evolution locomotive is the most technologically advanced, diesel-electric, heavy-haul locomotive in the world today. Its 12-cylinder engine produces the same horsepower as its 16-cylinder predecessor—and it does so using less fuel and producing fewer emissions than prior models. This new generation of locomotive proves it is possible to reduce locomotive life cycle costs while

meeting U.S. EPA Tier 2 emissions requirements. Today, more than 3,700 Evolution Series Locomotives are operating in 10 countries.

BNSF already has several hundred of these “Evolution Series” locomotives in service and many operate through Spokane daily.

Job opportunities

Spokane’s Yardley yard and BNSF’s Hauser yard near Rathdrum ID are already a major operating points for BNSF. Engineer and Conductor job opportunities will increase with this new business. These are good paying union jobs, averaging \$50,000 to \$80,000 per year.

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