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Emergency Services comment on increase coal train traffic through Thurston County
Impact on emergency medical vehicle response time and delay due to increased frequency of long
train traffic

1/18/2013

The following is a recommendation regarding citizen's concerned about increased Emergency Medical (or other emergency service Fire/Law Enforcement) vehicle response time as a consequence of increases in large and more frequent coal trains crossing (20 additional trains) per day through Thurston County.

There would be an impact to emergency vehicles needing to traverse at-grade rail crossings with an increase in frequency of long trains. To determine the level of impact the increased rail traffic with long trains would have on emergency medical response, an impedance analysis by the approving body perform should be performed. The impedance analysis could help determine the expected increase in emergency vehicle response time for at-grade rail crossings.

Suggestion: Perform emergency vehicle impedance analysis. The minimum information necessary to determine the impact of the additional trains impeding emergency vehicle crossings are:

1. time of day/schedule for all trains and additional new trains,
2. number of trains per day,
3. length of trains,
4. average speed of travel for each train type including the additional new trains
5. any circumstances that would impair train transit/speed (e.g. traversing a crossing before a train back to speed if slowed for a crossing and especially switching of tracks).

Related information:

1. Thurston County Board of County Commissioners resolution #14779, adopted Aug 7, 2012, citing public safety concern for emergency response vehicles being inhibited at crossings.
2. Letter from City of Olympia citing that the expected number of 1.5 mile long coal trains to increase by 9 trains per day northbound and an equal amount of trains southbound.
3. Rail crossing map from Thurston County public works department showing at-grade railroad crossings (red) that would inhibit response vehicles (fire, EMS and LE) to gain a perspective of the magnitude. Map attached.
4. There are 15 at-grade crossings on the Burlington Northern line and 22 at-grade crossings on the Weyerhaeuser line. Most worrisome on the BN line were: Marvin Rd/Indian Summer, Rich Rd/Fir Tree, Old 99/Crete/Rich Rd, Old 99/Waldrick Rd, Old 99/Offut Lk, Old 99/184th, and the two crossings in the Town of Bucoda.
5. There are two major rail lines through Thurston County. It is unknown which rail lines the coal trains will use but on either line there are a significant number of at-grade crossings. There are more rail crossings but the others are above or below grade (blue & green) so won't inhibit emergency vehicle response.
6. Currently there are over 50 freight and passenger train crossings through Thurston County on a daily basis.