

Dike District 1

Skagit County, Washington

February 26, 2009

The Honorable Rick Larsen
1529 Longworth House Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: 6-Year Federal Highway Bill Reauthorization: Proposal for BNSF Skagit River Bridge Replacement

Dear Congressman Larsen,

Dike District 1 requests your support for a contingent authorization of \$17.3 million to replace the BNSF Skagit River Bridge in the next 6-year federal highway reauthorization bill. Specifically, we request the reauthorization bill include a provision to *“Provide up to \$17,300,000 to replace the Cascade Gateway rail corridor bridge in Skagit County, Washington that crosses the Skagit River, contingent upon the private owner of that rail line and the state of Washington each contributing at least 1/3rd of the total project funding.”*

Replacing this bridge is important for at least four reasons: first, all of the technical studies indicate that this bridge must be modified or replaced in order to reduce the risk of catastrophic flooding of the County's main urban areas and transportation corridors. Second, studies indicate that freight and passenger traffic in this rail corridor will continue to grow, increasing regional, state and the national reliance on this bridge. Third, reliable rail facilities will facilitate movement of freight off of the crowded I-5, Highway 99, and SR-9 transportation systems to the rail corridor, resulting in a more fuel-efficient method to transport goods, less traffic congestion, and less air pollution. Finally, replacing the bridge will significantly improve the capability of the railroad to continue operations during a flood event, providing freight movement even when I-5, SR-9, and Highway 99 are closed. We believe that a partnership between federal, state, and local governments and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad is the only viable mechanism to achieve these goals.

The concept underlying this request is to provide an economic incentive for BNSF to enter a federal – state – local – BNSF partnership to replace the bridge. This proposal recognizes the public benefit of replacing the bridge to reduce flood risk to the urban areas of Skagit County and keep transportation arterials open during and after a large flood event. It requires BNSF to provide a third of the funding, but also provides a significant incentive for the railroad to do so. The proposal anticipates funding for the \$52 million bridge replacement project will be 1/3rd federal, 1/3rd state (similar to the recent state appropriation for the Chehalis / Lewis County area), and 1/3rd BNSF. Additionally, the adjacent levee setback work will be funded through local mechanisms already in place (Dike Districts 17 and 12 capital programs, and the City of Burlington's Drainage Utility).

This is a significant undertaking and in conjunction with the concept of getting this funding authorized in the next 6-year highway bill, the City of Burlington is also requesting a federal appropriation of \$600,000 in FY2010, to help with the preliminary engineering for bridge replacement. Dike District 1 supports this appropriations request.

On February 17th of this month, local elected officials and staff met with area legislators and a BNSF representative to discuss this proposal. BNSF was noncommittal but willing to give serious consideration to replacing the bridge, should the federal and state contingent authorizations become available.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Dike District 1 recognizes that getting the money together to replace this bridge is a very difficult prospect, and forming a public-private partnership to replace private infrastructure will not be easy. Nevertheless, we think it may be the best solution, and the timing for the reauthorization bill is now. Please feel free to contact me directly if you or your staff have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Donald J. Mae". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Commissioner