

### What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of the proposed Northern Columbia Basin Railroad (NCBR) Project is to provide rail service to lands designated for industrial development in the northern part of the City of Moses Lake as well as to the south and east of the Grant County International Airport (GCIA), to enhance opportunities for economic development, and to attract new rail-dependent businesses to those areas.

The three components of the proposed project include:

- Segment 1 - Building a new rail line between the community of Wheeler and Parker Horn (a water body and an arm of Moses Lake) or Crab Creek to join to the existing line;
- Segment 2 - Extending the existing track, which currently terminates just south of the GCIA, to the industrial lands located east of the GCIA; and
- Segment 3 - Improving existing track between Parker Horn and the GCIA.

The new rail line segments would be constructed and owned by the Port of Moses Lake (Port). The existing rail segment is currently owned by Columbia Basin Railroad Company (CBRW), and would be acquired and refurbished by the Port. All three line segments would be operated by CBRW.

Although the proposed project would allow trains to bypass downtown Moses Lake, the project does not include abandonment of the existing rail line that runs through downtown Moses Lake. If that line were proposed for abandonment in the future, that would be a separate action before the STB and would be subject to a separate environmental review by SEA.

Reliable and efficient rail service may favorably influence a community's ability to attract new businesses and improve the local economy. The City of Moses Lake has maintained a steady 3 percent growth rate, increasing employment by 22 percent from 2001 to 2006, at an annual rate of 4.4 percent.<sup>1</sup> This growth is partly a result of the transportation services available in the area, including rail and highway access. Implementing the project would expand railroad service and add to the existing transportation network.

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<sup>1</sup> Brewer, Terry. 2008. Grant County Economic Development Council. E-mail message addressed to Alivia Body, HDR. Material is derived from the Washington State Employment Security Department, Labor Market and Economic Analysis, Average Employment, 2001 and 2006. April 8, 2008.

## Why is this project needed?

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the project team interviewed representatives of existing and potential rail customers, as well as representatives of CBRW and BNSF Railway Company (BNSF). The results of these interviews are summarized in the *Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project Feasibility Study*.<sup>2</sup> Other groups and organizations, such as the ASPI Group, the Port of Moses Lake, the Moses Lake Chamber of Commerce, and the Grant County Economic Development Council also provided input (together the project “stakeholders”). These stakeholders believe that good rail service is paramount to attracting new businesses into the area and improving the local economy.

The stakeholders determined that the proposed rail project is needed to stimulate economic development and to preserve existing freight rail service. As presented in the *Moses Lake Railroad Task Force Feasibility/Cost Study*,<sup>3</sup> industrial growth is important to future economic development in the region.

The GCIA and the Port of Moses Lake Industrial Park provide service to many businesses and individuals. The GCIA has 2,000 acres of low-cost available land in its industrial park, mainly in the eastern and southern areas of the GCIA property. While the southern area is served by existing rail, the eastern area is not.

The other major area zoned and available for industrial development is in the northern part of the City of Moses Lake along Wheeler Road (Road 3 NE). Existing businesses that use rail service are located at the eastern end of the project area, where existing rail service is available. The area along Wheeler Road (Road 3 NE) between the existing rail line and Parker Horn is being promoted for future development by the Port of Moses Lake and the Grant County Economic Development Council. According to these agencies, businesses that have expressed interest in the area cited rail service as important to their relocation. The Port believes that improvements to rail service in this corridor would make the area more attractive to businesses and would aid in promoting this development.

Under the Washington State Growth Management Act,<sup>4</sup> a comprehensive plan amendment is required to rezone areas to industrial use from non-industrial designations. Land already designated for industrial use, such as that along the project corridor, can be developed without requiring an amendment.

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<sup>2</sup> Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). 2006. *Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project Feasibility Study*. February 2006.  
<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/freight/images/Northern%20Columbia%20Basin%20Railroad%20Project%20Feasibility%20Study.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Jessup, Eric L. and Kenneth L. Casavant. *Moses Lake Railroad Task Force Feasibility/Cost Study*. Prepared for the Port of Moses Lake. 2003. Also released as *Strategic Freight Transportation Analysis: Rail Lien Investment Alternatives Resulting from Abandonment: A Case Study of Moses Lake, WA*. By Eric L. Jessup and Kenneth L. Casavant, Washington State University, July 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 36.70A Revised Code of Washington (RCW).

## What are the existing railroads in the project vicinity?

Rail service in the project area is currently provided by CBRW, which is a Class III short line railroad.<sup>5</sup> CBRW is one of several short line railroads that provide freight rail service to local communities in Washington.



Existing CBRW track at Road M at McDonald Station

CBRW provides a connection between the project area and the national rail network, in this case, main lines operated by BNSF. CBRW's main branch extends from Connell to the community of Wheeler,<sup>6</sup> connecting with the BNSF main line at Connell. This is CBRW's only connection to the BNSF main line and the national rail system.

**Exhibit 2.1** shows the location of the CBRW and BNSF rail lines in the project vicinity.

## What are the existing rail operations?

CBRW operates six days per week on the following segments:

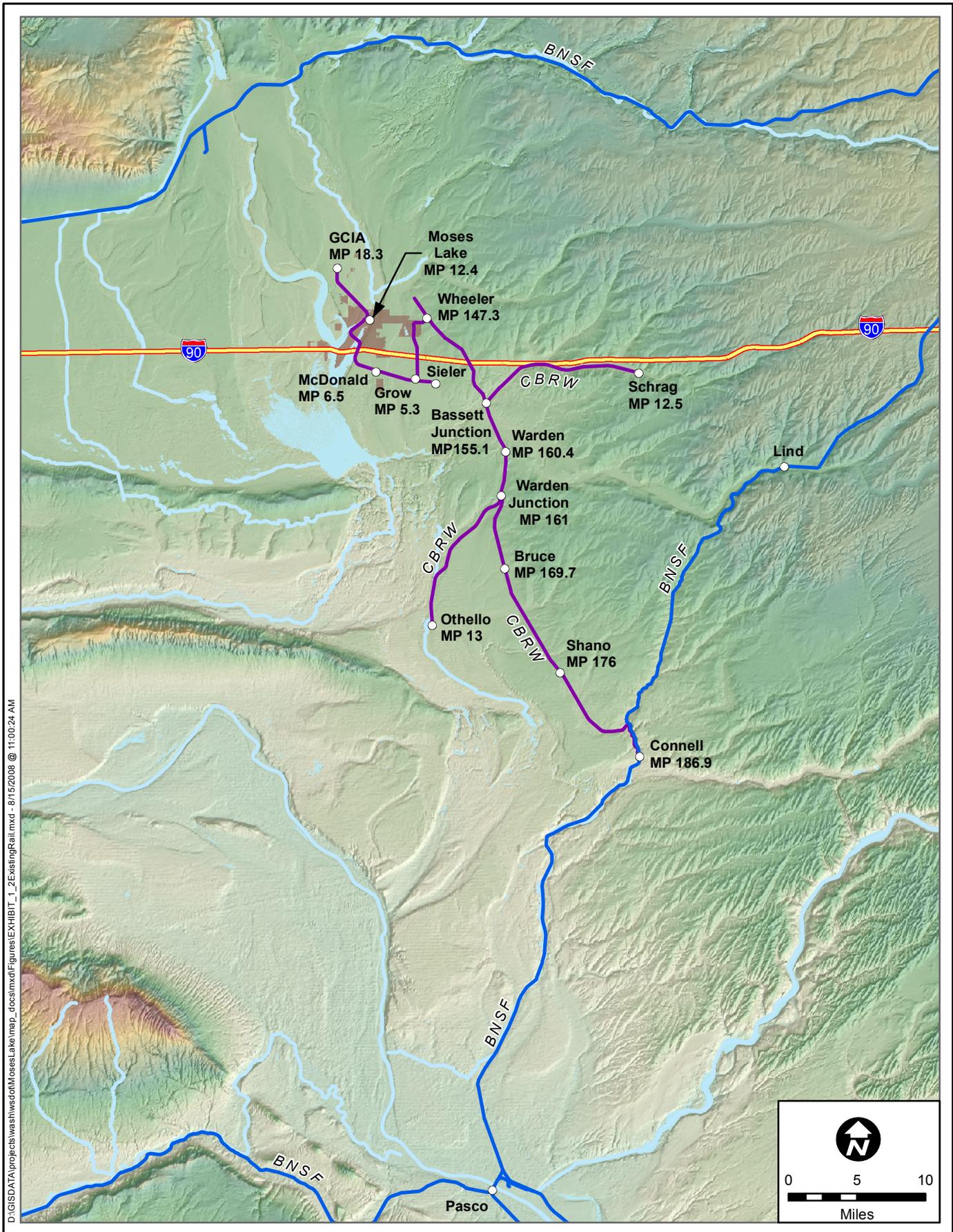
- Warden to Connell (including service to Othello).
- Warden to Wheeler.
- Warden local (which typically covers the Schrag Branch and switching in Bruce).
- Beyond Wheeler Road (Road 3 NE) (two days per week).
- Service to GCIA on an as-needed basis (covered by the Warden to Wheeler service).

At Connell, CBRW transfers freight to the BNSF Columbia Gorge main line and the route via Stampede Pass. Cars are dropped off by CBRW and then brought by BNSF to its yard in Pasco. At the yard, cars are sorted by destination and then connected to trains traveling east and west.

<sup>5</sup> A "short line" railroad is a railroad that generally serves industries in small communities by providing a link to the larger, national rail network.

<sup>6</sup> The community of Wheeler is referred to as "Wheeler" throughout this document. Wheeler Road is referred to as "Wheeler Road (Road 3 NE)."

In 2007, CBRW handled approximately 8,700 carloads of primarily agricultural products, including grain, sugar beets, fresh and frozen potatoes, fertilizers, chemicals, and paper products. Beyond the McDonald siding, CBRW handled 108 carloads, of which 22 carloads originated or terminated at two GCIA-area rail shippers, Northern Energy and REC Solar Grade Silicon, LLC.



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