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STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
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January 9, 2009

The Hon. Judy Warnick
House of Representatives
JLOB 403
Olympia WA 98504

RE: Rail Safety Issues at Longview Elementary School

Dear Representative Warnick:

Thank you for meeting with me on December 3, 2008, to discuss the rail safety issues at Longview Elementary School in Moses Lake. I write now to summarize where we are at this point.

On October 21, 2008, staff from the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (commission) met with you, school officials, and Columbia Basin Railroad representatives to discuss the issue of railroad safety near the school. We are aware that students are crossing the railroad tracks to reach school and then crossing them again when they return home. There is no designated pedestrian crossing or any other safety device at this location, making it particularly hazardous for the students. Columbia Basin Railroad owns and operates trains on the tracks.

During the meeting, we inspected the site and discussed options for improving safety for the students. These included:

- Continuing to repair fences and find other means to keep students off the tracks.
- Redirecting students to existing crossings located at Maple Drive Northeast or Stratford Road Northeast.
- Installing fencing or other means to channel students into one single crossing site.
- Constructing a pedestrian crossing that allows students to cross the tracks, but that would bring a gate-arm down when a train is approaching, blocking access to the tracks.
- Constructing an under-crossing that allows students to avoid the tracks completely.

Those attending the meeting agreed that this last option is best in terms of rail safety, although it raises issues related to personal safety for children in a tunnel setting. We also agreed that installing fencing is critical to directing students toward the crossing and away from unprotected tracks.

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Unfortunately, construction of an under-crossing is also the most expensive option. Last year, the railroad unsuccessfully sought public funding for an under-crossing, and has made clear that without public funding, it will not be able to construct such a crossing.

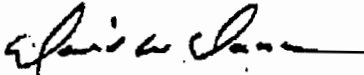
While we recognize the challenge in obtaining funding, we also strongly believe that the parties must take immediate action to improve safety for students and other pedestrians crossing the tracks at this location. For this reason, we recommend that the railroad consider a pedestrian-only, at-grade crossing as an intermediate solution. We also recommend the school district and the railroad install fencing which will channel students to the crossing. An at-grade crossing is not the optimal solution, but we believe it will do much to reduce the current safety risks near the school.

As I mentioned in our meeting, the commission has a grant program, the Grade Crossing Protection Fund, which could help fund some of the improvements at this location. Please know that we are willing to work with stakeholders to assist them in applying for funding.

Commission staff and other Operation Lifesaver volunteers are scheduled to provide educational presentations on rail safety to students at Longview Elementary School on January 13, 2009. An evening session will also be offered to community members who live near the tracks at this location. Annual Operation Lifesaver presentations are planned for the students and citizens that live near the tracks.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, you may contact me at (360) 664-1208 or ddanner@utc.wa.gov.

Sincerely,



David W. Danner
Executive Director and Secretary

cc: Senator Janea Holmquist
Columbia Basin Railroad
Moses Lake School District
Dave Pratt, Assistant Director Safety & Consumer Protection