



May 4, 2018

Mr. Steven M. Fischer
Thirteenth Coast Guard District
915 2nd Ave, Room 3510
Seattle, WA 98174

Dear Mr. Fischer:

On behalf of the Washington Public Ports Association, I am writing to express my strong support for BNSF Railway's Sandpoint Junction Connector Project. Furthermore, I ask that the application review and approval of permits be completed in the most efficient manner possible.

Sandpoint, ID is a stop on the Great Northern Corridor, which connects Washington state with northern tier states as far away as Illinois. Washington's ports have long understood the value this corridor has on the economy of our state and indeed the success of our economic development mission. Maintaining a safe and efficient rail connection that allows the corridor to prosper is a high priority for ports in Washington state.

In 2017, the Washington Public Ports Association updated our Marine Cargo Forecast. The forecast provides us both a glimpse into the economies of our international trading partners as well as informative data on how goods movement will occur during the next twenty years. The forecast advised that the regional rail system serving Washington's ports currently functions well. However, according to our forecast, chokepoints and bottlenecks begin to occur with more frequency beginning in the 2020 and 2025 forecast horizon. We know that for Washington's ports to remain competitive this corridor must operate efficiently with sufficient capacity to handle cargo volume growth we expect in the near future. We believe the Sandpoint Junction Connector project will alleviate one of the bottlenecks identified in the Marine Cargo Forecast. For more information or to read the 2017 Marine Cargo Forecast, please visit www.washingtonports.org/mcf.

We also recognize that local impacts are important to consider when evaluating the merits of transportation projects. Like many of the communities our member ports serve, Sandpoint has been a critical railway interchange point for over 110 years. The local impact

Washington Public Ports Association

A Trade Association Representing the 75 Public Port Districts of Washington State

1501 Capitol Way, Suite 304 • Olympia, WA 98501 • 360.943.0760 • 360.753.6176 FAX • www.washingtonports.org

of the Sandpoint Junction Connector Project is positive for the region. With two tracks, trains will no longer need to stop and wait for oncoming train traffic. This means that at-grade crossings currently allowing only one train to pass at a time will be less congested as trains may now be able to occupy the crossings concurrently, reducing wait times for vehicles. The reduced wait time will also result in reduced emissions from both vehicles as well as an end to the idling train locomotives waiting for a clear track to proceed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this very important infrastructure project. The Sandpoint Junction Connector project will provide improved rail capacity to support growing economies all along the northern tier states, including many of Washington's ports. The project will also reduce the time at-grade crossings are blocked and lead to reduced wait times for vehicles. For these reasons, I urge you to review this project and expedite the approval of permits.

Sincerely,



Eric D. Johnson
Executive Director

CC: Shane Slate, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Idaho Department of Lands