



Introduction

Rail transportation is an integral part of our regional and national economy. BNSF Railway Company (BNSF Railway) is one of the busiest rail lines in the region and transports passengers and freight on the Bellingham Subdivision and freight only on the Anacortes subdivision every day. The proposed project would add six round-trip trains per week traveling to and from the Shell Puget Sound Refinery (PSR). This fact sheet summarizes the potential impacts the proposed project would have on the regional rail transportation network.

What was studied?

The study examined how the proposed project could affect rail traffic and transportation in the following ways:

- Create changes to at-grade crossing operations (increased blockages or delays at intersections)
- Create changes to regional capacity for rail traffic

What was the study area?

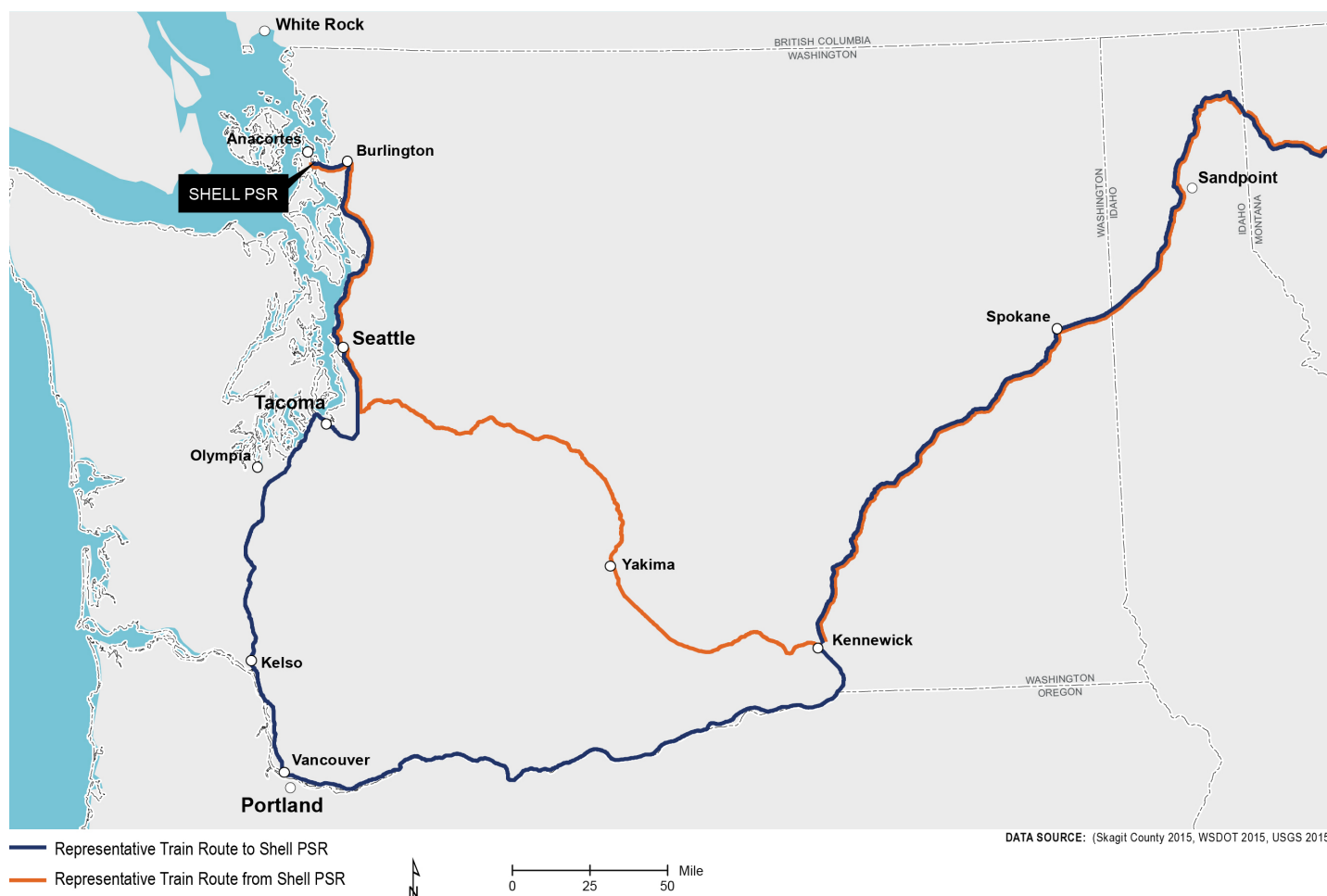
- Rail corridor (Bellingham and Anacortes subdivisions) required to transport crude oil by rail to the Shell PSR (see Figure 3.15-1 of the draft EIS)
- Eight state highway at-grade railroad crossings along the rail line that are considered sensitive to increases in rail traffic (see Figure 3.15-3 of the draft EIS)
- The BNSF Railway main line route(s) proposed for the transport of crude by rail to the Shell PSR within Washington from Sandpoint, Idaho (see Figure 3.15-2 of the draft EIS)

See the Proposed Project Fact Sheet for a map of the site.

How were impacts analyzed?

At-Grade Crossing Operations Analysis

Ten at-grade railroad crossings on the rail corridor (Anacortes Subdivision) and 15 at-grade railroad crossings on the Bellingham



Subdivision between Burlington and the Skagit/Snohomish county line were studied.



Example of an at-grade crossing (intersection of South Burlington Boulevard/Anacortes Subdivision, looking southwest)

Rail Traffic Capacity Analysis

Federal Railroad Administration crossing inventory data were collected and recently prepared agency studies provided a foundation for the rail traffic analysis. To evaluate potential impacts of the proposed Shell PSR unit trains on other rail traffic along the rail corridor (Bellingham and Anacortes Subdivisions), rail traffic data were compiled and analyzed.

What are the potential impacts?

Construction Impacts

Rail access to the proposed unloading facility would be provided by a new connection to the existing rail corridor (Anacortes Subdivision) located to the southeast, which would require modifications to the Anacortes Subdivision configuration. Short segments of the existing Anacortes Subdivision and a siding track would be realigned slightly to the south.

Temporary construction impacts to rail traffic could occur as the new alignment is brought into operation. The majority of the construction would be done adjacent to the existing rail line and the only disruption to rail traffic would occur when the formal rail line connection is made. BNSF Railway would manage the timing, testing, and opening of the new alignment and maintain current rail operations to the extent possible to minimize delay.

Operation Impacts

During operation, the proposed project would increase traffic along the Anacortes Subdivision by up to six unit trains per week, or two trips per day on average (one in each direction). Intersection occupancy time by a Shell unit train would be approximately 8 minutes. Marine boat traffic would experience approximately 12-minute delays at the Swinomish Channel Swing Bridge to allow for the closing of the bridge, the passing of a train, and the re-opening of the bridge.

Cumulative Impacts

As no other reasonably foreseeable future actions were identified for the Anacortes Subdivision, the cumulative impact would be the same as the direct impact.

The proposed project, combined with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, would contribute to a cumulative impact on the rail transportation network in Washington State. In the Washington State Rail Plan, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) indicates that five of the nine subdivisions used by proposed project unit trains are projected to be overcapacity by 2035 (WSDOT 2014).

Although they would represent a small portion of existing and projected traffic, the two additional proposed Shell unit train trips per day would contribute to a cumulative impact on the capacity of the rail transportation network. Rail capacity is an issue that the railroad companies continually monitor and address. BNSF Railway would likely address key capacity issues as they arise.

What mitigation measures are proposed?

Avoidance and Minimization

No avoidance or minimization measures are proposed for the addition of six unit trains per week in each direction to existing traffic.

Mitigation

No mitigation measures are proposed.

Are there unavoidable significant adverse impacts?

No unavoidable significant adverse impacts were identified

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC?

Chapter 3.15 – Rail Traffic and Transportation of the draft EIS

The information in this fact sheet summarizes content from the draft Environmental Impact Statement; please review the full document for more detailed and complete information.

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