

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1201

May 12, 2019

Mr. Steven Fischer
Commander, Thirteenth Coast Guard District
Federal Building
915 Second Avenue
Seattle, WA 98174-1067

Dear Commander Fisher:

I am writing to express my support for the Sandpoint Junction Connector Project and encourage the Coast Guard to pursue an Environmental Assessment (EA).

This critical project will relieve current rail congestion and allow for the more efficient movement of trains through the Lake Pend Oreille region. Fluid freight movement is critical to moving goods produced in North Idaho to domestic and foreign markets. When there is congestion, there is a ripple effect across the entire Northern Tier and hurts the delivery of goods getting to markets around the world.

As outlined in the EA, the improvements for this project are expected to relieve rail traffic congestion and reduce hold times on sidings, as well as wait time at grade crossings. As a result, local drivers could see shorter wait times on nearby roads that cross BNSF tracks, and the flow of freight and passenger trains will be improved throughout the region.

In 2017, 70 percent of the BNSF trains that moved through Sandpoint carried agricultural goods, consumer goods or mixed freight. This corridor serves as Amtrak's only route across the northern United States, connecting Chicago with the West Coast. As such, this project is vital not only for freight but also for passenger rail.

I also want to highlight that during preparation of the draft EA, BNSF and the US Coast Guard worked collaboratively with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to proactively identify and implement minimization measures to ensure the protection of threatened Bull Trout. And the draft EA concludes that the project will not result in significant impacts to any elements of the human or natural environment.

I urge the Coast Guard to approve the necessary permits for this project. Thank you for your attention to this comprehensive review.

Sincerely,



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress