

ITEM	10
MANAGER'S REPORT NO.	61
COUNCIL MEETING	93/10/12

TO: CITY MANAGER 1993 OCTOBER 05

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING OUR FILE: 08.240

SUBJECT: **PACIFIC NORTHWEST HIGH SPEED RAIL CORRIDOR  
REINTRODUCTION OF TRAIN SERVICE BETWEEN VANCOUVER AND  
SEATTLE.**

PURPOSE: To acquaint Council with the status of plans to reintroduce rail service between Vancouver and Seattle and to obtain Council's approval in principle to the proposal.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **THAT** Council indicate its approval in principle to the reintroduction of train service between Seattle and Vancouver as described in this report.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be forwarded to the Chairperson, GVRD Board of Directors.

**R E P O R T**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In a letter dated 1993 June 15, Chairperson Campbell informed Council that the GVRD Board had received and endorsed in principle a proposal to restore passenger rail service between Vancouver and Seattle by 1994 October.

Since that time, a number of meetings have been held between the proponents, regulatory authorities and representatives of local municipalities through which the train will pass.

The purpose of this report is to inform Council on the specifics of the reintroduction of the Vancouver-Seattle rail service and to seek approval in principle for the proposal.

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## 2.0 BACKGROUND

Rail service between Vancouver and Seattle was discontinued in 1981. At that time, the trip took between 4 1/2 and 5 hours one way, with additional time for border delays. The service was not found to be competitive with air and other forms of travel and was discontinued.

The renewed interest in passenger train service in the Pacific Northwest relates to a designation of the Pacific Northwest High Speed Rail Corridor by the Federal Railroad Administration (USA) as one of five high speed rail corridors in the United States. As a result funding is available to study and demonstrate the feasibility of establishing high speed rail service, where trains can achieve rail speeds above 90 mph. The Pacific Northwest High Speed Rail Corridor extends from Eugene, Oregon to Vancouver, B.C., a distance of 464 miles (see attached Figure 1). A copy of a brochure describing the corridor proposal has been included with the agendas of Members of Council. A copy of this brochure is available for viewing in the Planning and Building Department.

## 3.0 SERVICE PROPOSAL

The ultimate goal for the corridor is to permit operational speeds of up to 125 mph for intercity passenger service and an average speed of 90 mph. Only about 25 percent of the corridor between Seattle and Vancouver will be capable of reaching top speed.

The short term goals for the corridor calls for the re-establishment of service between Seattle and Vancouver by 1994 October (one round trip daily) by Amtrak. While not finalized, it is projected that the Vancouver train departure will be at 8:00 am and the arrival at 10:30 pm. Also proposed is an additional round trip between Portland and Seattle during 1994. This would result in four round trips daily between Portland and Seattle with a travel time of 3 hrs. 45 mins.

The Seattle to Vancouver service in the initial phase must meet a target time of 3 hrs. 55 mins. in order to qualify for the federal funding requirements. There would be no routine border stops. Agreement has been reached between the customs and immigration services of both countries to provide southbound travellers with customs pre-clearance at the Vancouver station. The first southbound stop upon leaving Vancouver would be Bellingham. In the northbound direction, Canadian Customs officials would process passengers at the Vancouver station (Pacific Central Station on Main Street).

It is anticipated that a round trip fare between Vancouver and Seattle would be approximately \$40.

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By 1999, it has been proposed that there would be three round trips daily between Vancouver and Seattle with the travel time reduced to 3 hrs. 30 mins. Between Portland and Seattle there would be six round trips daily with a travel time down to 3 hrs. 26 mins.

Total funding over the period 1993-1999 for the entire Vancouver-Eugene corridor is estimated at US \$266.2M. Funding for the period 1993-1995 has been approved and amounts to approximately US \$40.2 M.

#### **4.0 DISCUSSION OF ISSUES**

##### **Speed and Safety**

One of the questions raised in relation to this proposal deals with the matter of speed and the impact on safety. Within the Canadian portion of the corridor there are 20 level crossings, with all but three having some degree of protection. In Burnaby there are five crossings, all of which have gates, flashers and bells - the highest level of protection provided.

While this relates to a high speed rail facility, the typical speeds proposed on the Canadian leg are in the 40 to 60 mph range. Within Burnaby itself, the increased operating speed proposed for the Vancouver-Seattle passenger train is only 5 mph, from 40 mph to 45 mph. Neither Transport Canada, which has a regulatory role under the Railway Safety Act, nor staff view this minimally increased speed for the two trains a day as posing any additional safety hazard within the City.

For the interest of Council, discussions between BNR, Amtrak, Transport Canada and the cities of White Rock and Surrey are continuing to deal with pedestrian access and safety as related to beach access.

##### **Commuter Service**

The proposal as advanced functions as an inter-city service. In view of the border crossing method and the need to keep the travel time below the 3 hr. 55 min. threshold in order to be eligible for funding, no intervening stops will be provided in Canada. As such, the use of this facility for commuter purposes would not be possible. It does not rule out however the possible introduction of a stand alone commuter rail service using the same rail line at some point in the future if this was found to be desirable.

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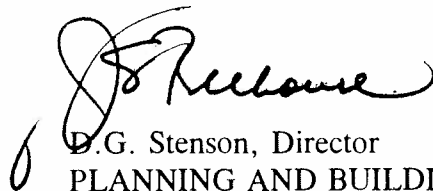
### Ultra High Speed Rail Service

The Pacific Northwest High Speed Rail Corridor was given some preliminary consideration for a potential ultra high speed rail system where speeds would typically be in the 150 to 300 mph range. This notion was rejected primarily on the basis of the high costs (\$9 to 12 billion) for implementing the system.

The maximum speed for the proposed system will be 125 mph in the United States for about 25 percent of the length of the rail line, while in Canada the maximum speed is 60 mph.

### 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Reintroduction of a Vancouver to Seattle train service is proposed to occur by 1994 October. The operating speeds, overall travel times and proposed fare structure are intended to make this a viable and competitive form of intercity travel. From an operational, safety and neighbourhood related viewpoint, the introduction of this limited frequency service is not expected to result in any additional negative impacts. As such, approval in principle for the reintroduction of this services is recommended by staff.

  
D.G. Stenson, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

  
JSB\jp

Attachment

cc: Director Engineering  
Fire Chief  
Director Administrative & Community Services

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