Edmonds Street Waterfront Connector

Ground view of project

View from top of project

December 2016
Problem
The City of Edmonds and its partner transportation agencies are working to implement near-term and long-term solutions to at-grade railroad crossing conflicts affecting freight and passenger rail, a state highway and ferry terminal, transit, and local vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Access between downtown Edmonds and the waterfront community on Puget Sound is available through only two roadways, Main Street and Dayton Street, each of which crosses the BNSF tracks at grade and only ¼-mile apart. Passing trains simultaneously close both crossings, cutting off access to the waterfront. Currently, gates at the Main Street and Dayton Street crossings are closed for passing trains an average 6% of each day. With rail traffic projected to grow 50 to 100% by 2030, the number and duration of gate closures will correspondingly increase. More critically, a few times a year trains break down or are otherwise stalled, blocking both crossings for several hours and cutting off all access to and from the waterfront community. Of gravest concern is the denial of access to emergency responders and the serious safety risks posed by delays to firefighters, medical personnel and police during such emergencies.

Process
Edmonds Mayor Dave Earling formed an Advisory Task Force to oversee a 14-month alternatives analysis and recommend a course of actions to address the needs for improved waterfront access. The Task Force comprised representatives from the City of Edmonds, Port of Edmonds, BNSF Railroad, Washington State Department of Transportation, Washington State Ferries, Sound Transit (passenger rail service), Community Transit (regional bus service), and local residents. The study process extensively engaged the community through print, online and social media and through four open house meetings conducted both live and on-line at key points during the study. Throughout the study, briefings were conducted to the Mayor, City Council, Port Commission, transportation and public safety staff, and community groups. Over 50 potential solutions were initially considered, with 11 alternatives being studied in detail. The Task Force convened twice monthly over 13 months to define the purpose and needs for the project, develop evaluation criteria, and comparatively assess the alternatives. A final slate of recommended actions was presented to Mayor Earling, who in turn presented his recommendations to City Council in November 2016 and directed the identified projects to the City’s capital improvement program.

Solution
In addition to immediate, operational interventions that could help address some emergency response issues, the final slate of potential solutions consisted of three alternatives: a low-cost pedestrian access bridge, an emergency vehicle flyover, and a fully grade-separated, new ferry terminal with emergency access. The pedestrian bridge was considered to provide little ultimate benefit, while the new ferry terminal would cost hundreds of millions of dollars and may take up to 25 years to implement. For these reasons the cost-effective, readily implementable Edmonds Street Waterfront Connector, providing emergency vehicle access when necessary and full-time pedestrian and bicycle access to/from the waterfront, was selected. This is a one-lane roadway bridge spanning the railroad tracks to connect the police and fire stations directly to the waterfront, providing immediate access for emergency responders and emergency ferry off-load and on-load. It will also provide pedestrian and bicycle access from Sunset Avenue to Brackett’s Landing Park and the waterfront. The cost to implement this project is estimated between $22 and 26 million.