PNWER Regional Infrastructure Accelerator

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# High Performance Rail

## Pines Road Grade Separation Project

***As our communities grow around railroad infrastructure, new challenges arise for the trains and the people who live and work near the tracks***. Trains are an integral part of the U.S. supply chain and critical for the goods movement that drives our local and national economies. But anyone who has been stuck waiting for a train to pass knows that rail traffic can feel very disruptive to the flow of day-to-day life.

The good news is that road and rail traffic don't need to conflict with one another. The bad news is that it's expensive to construct the infrastructure to make that happen.

### Case Study: Pines Road Highway-Rail Grade Separation

Between Spokane, WA, and the Idaho border, the City of Spokane Valley is a fast-growing community bisected East-West by Interstate 90 (I-90) and WA State Route 290 (SR 290), and North-South by State Route 27 (SR 27) - known locally as Pines Road. BNSF, one of the major Class I railroads in the U.S., passes through Spokane Valley as it carries major exports from the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma to Chicago and back. This is the same rail line used by the Amtrak Empire Builder carrying passengers on the iconic trek from Seattle to Chicago.

SR 27 (Pines Road) and SR 290 (locally known as Trent Avenue) are critical local commuter and freight roadways, with SR 290 often used as an alternate route to I-90 for commuter and freight traffic. These critical road corridors intersect less than 300 feet from a major crossing of the BNSF main line. The Pines Road at-grade rail crossing creates a bottleneck for freight movement, and increases the danger of collisions with the cars, trucks, school buses, and pedestrians who regularly cross Pines Road. Parents of students attending the nearby Trent Elementary School and emergency response vehicles are among the residents waiting an accumulated 4 hours per day at the rail crossing.

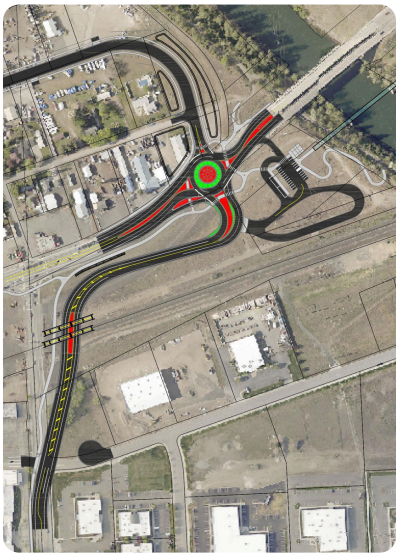
### At-Grade Rail Crossings

When highways and railroads have an intersection at the same level or 'grade,' requiring vehicles to drive over train tracks to cross to the other side. To avoid collisions, safety measures including signs, bells, flashing lights, and gates are used to allow trains to pass these at-grade intersections.[1]

[1] U.S. Federal Railroad Administration. "Highway-Rail Grade Crossings Overview." December 4, 2019. https://railroads.dot.gov/program-areas/highway-rail-grade-crossing/highway-rail-grade-crossings-overview

***Separating roads and train tracks produces economic, environmental, safety, and accessibility benefits***. Grade separation lowers traffic congestion, moves freight more efficiently, lowers emissions from idling, lowers the chance of collisions, and results in less noise pollution. Despite these many benefits, finding funding for grade separation projects can be difficult.

Washington state recognized the need for the Pines Road grade separation project in 2000, but deferred Pines Road for over two decades due to lack of funding. The City of Spokane Valley began re-investing planning dollars into the project in the mid-2010's, redesigning the grade separation as an underpass that includes a new trailhead with restrooms, EV charging, bus parking, and a separated shared-use path for pedestrians and cyclists under the railway. The rail overpass will have as many as four rail lines, allowing the rail network to meet future freight movement demands. Despite this innovative redesign, the city was unsuccessful in several rounds of federal funding applications.



*City of Spokane Valley*

The PNWER Regional Infrastructure Accelerator (RIA) program identified the Pines Road highway-rail grade separation as a regionally-significant project that would benefit from acceleration and technical assistance. In 2022, the PNWER RIA program team successfully encouraged Washington's Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB) to re-prioritize the project after decades on the 'deferred' status list. This enabled the city to access additional state funds, and demonstrated the importance of the project to Washington state's freight flows.

After several years of unsuccessfully seeking federal grants, the City of Spokane Valley secured a $22 million Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant for the Pines Road project in 2022. With several other US Department of Transportation grants, paired with local and state matching funds, the Pines Road rail grade separation project is now fully funded. Construction on the project is expected to begin in summer 2024.

***Highway-rail grade separation projects like these, while often overlooked, are critical for improving community safety, emergency response access, and freight and passenger movement along the corridor***. In addition to the grade separation, the project includes a new trailhead for the Centennial Trail among other community benefits, serving as an exemplary model of blending multimodal investments with rail improvement projects

https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/CSS441-SR27-32ndAveIntSpokaneValley-SR290Jct.pdf
https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/CSS446-SR290-i90JctSpokane-IdahoStateLine.pdf