



Second BNSF bridge to keep trade flowing through Idaho, PNW

By Senator Chuck Winder and Bruce Agnew, co-chairs of the [Pacific NorthWest Economic Region \(PNWER\)](#) Transportation Committee

For years, BNSF trains have safely traversed the bridge over Lake Pend Oreille, efficiently shuttling goods and commodities to foreign and domestic markets.

Now, in an effort to further expedite shipping and modernize rail in the Pacific Northwest, BNSF is proposing a multi-million dollar upgrade in the form of a second parallel bridge that will allow rail traffic to move even safer in both directions simultaneously. The new bridge will reduce the times trains have to wait for other trains to cross the bridge. The backups created by waiting trains can sometimes extend for many miles. The second rail bridge will reduce delays in the city, improve air quality and reduce noise by cutting idle times while the trains are stopped in Sandpoint.

The Pacific Northwest Economic Region has worked with Class One and short line railroads to improve rail access and public safety along our trade corridors for many years. The BNSF Sand Point Junction Connector project is a premier national project with regional and local benefits.

The trains that cross this bridge carry varieties of cargo. This proposal is being challenged because of opposition to two commodities: coal and oil. Opponents are using reduction of fossil fuel dependence as a means to stop this investment in our region's infrastructure, to the detriment of all other commodities shipped by rail.

BNSF helps deliver to Idahoans a vast array of consumer products including packaged goods, clothes, appliances, electronics, and automobiles. In all, BNSF moves nearly 1.4 million carloads of freight in Idaho annually. The BNSF Great Northern Corridor route services Idaho's agriculture, timber and other industries and helps them grow and compete in today's global economy. Schedule reliability for the popular Amtrak Empire Builder from Seattle and Portland to Chicago with benefits to local tourism will also be enhanced by the Connector.

The continued growth of freight rail from the Midwest to the West Coast has pushed capacity to the point where a new bridge is needed to handle increased shipping needs. This route moves tons of fresh food and grain each year – apples, potatoes, wheat and corn that feeds families in America and around the globe. Without a second line, food will take longer to reach markets. On time delivery of freight is critical for our local growers, ranchers and farmers and the second bridge will help ensure world market access.

This same line also transports manufactured goods, either in the form of raw materials or finished products. This includes medical equipment, computer products and airplane parts to Boeing and their Puget Sound manufacturing facilities which has a positive ripple effect through the Northwest economy.

From natural resources, to agriculture, advanced manufacturing and food production, the Pacific Northwest trade-based economy depends on adequate capital investment and safety conscious

operations by rail, trucking, and pipeline networks as well as dependable market access for ports such as the Port of Lewiston. Residents of Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon benefit by the billions of private dollars BNSF Railway has invested in this corridor recently and the Sand Point Junction Connector is prime evidence.

Senator Chuck Winder and Bruce Agnew are co-chairs of the [Pacific NorthWest Economic Region \(PNWER\)](#) Transportation Committee. They will also be discussing the topic of the Sandpoint Connector and other infrastructure issues at the [PNWER Annual Summit in Spokane, July 22-26](#).

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