Implementing Railroad-DOT Mitigation Strategies, A DOT Perspective

Ahmer Nizam
Utilities and Railroad Program Manager
Project Development Division

Spring, 2015
Washington has 3,000+ miles of freight, passenger, and short-line rail lines

- BNSF and Union Pacific own 60% of the rail network, by mileage.
- 1,450 miles of short track Class III rail lines.
- A 300-mile high-speed rail passenger rail corridor undergoing $800 million in federally-funded upgrades.
Passenger Rail – Amtrak Cascades.
• 467-mile corridor.
  − 300 miles in WA.
  − 134 miles in OR.
  − 33 miles in BC.

BNSF and UP own the tracks.

Amtrak operates the service.
• WSDOT pays Amtrak via contract.
• Amtrak pays the railroads.

Talgo and Amtrak maintain equipment.
• Washington pays Talgo via contract
• Seven trainsets:
  − Washington owns three.
  − Amtrak owns two.
  − Oregon added two in July 2013.

www.wsdot.wa.gov/rail
www.AmtrakCascades.com
High-Speed Rail Capital Investments

• Federal high-speed rail funds – approximately $800 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

• Supports overall program goal of more frequent and reliable Amtrak Cascades service:
  – Two additional round trips between Seattle and Portland, for a total of six.
  – Improved on-time performance to 88%.
  – 10-minute schedule reduction between Seattle and Portland.

• 20 projects in Washington adding capacity, passenger stations, safety features, and upgrading and extending tracks.
Collaborating with railroads is important to WSDOT.

- Washington DOT was involved in all phases of the project:
  - SHRP2 R16 research (2008).
  - R16A outreach and the Community of Interest.
  - R16B tools and training.
- Frequent highway project coordination.
- High-speed rail program.
Historical Challenges

• Planning for railroad coordination, property rights, plan approvals, etc.
• Negotiating agreements.
• Railroads typically own underlying property.
• Regulated by the Surface Transportation Board, FRA, state public utilities commissions.
• No two railroads are alike.

• Federal preemption over state and local regulation.
• Many railroads operate in multiple States and must coordinate with many different public agencies.
• Pre-construction and coordination construction.
ARRA Program

- Standardization of schedules as a collaborative effort.
- Risk modeling with all partners.
- Quarterly executive and “over the shoulder” reviews.
- Invoice processing changes – both internal and railroad.
- C&M Agreement – task order process to authorize work and manage cost risk.
- The Big Table – internal coordination of all things rail.
Scenario in 2005

- WSDOT was preparing to deliver the largest transportation program in its history, including dozens of projects impacting several railroads.

- Our railroad coordination model was adequate up until this time, but two factors suggested that something more was needed:
  - The number of railroad construction agreements, easements, and other documents required within a short period of time (30 agreements with BNSF alone).
  - Design-build delivery.
BNSF Railway Manager for WSDOT Projects

• April 2007 – Entered into an agreement with BNSF to assign a public projects manager dedicated to WSDOT projects.

• Term was extended twice.

• Expired at the end of June 2012.

• This arrangement helped to expedite engineering and legal reviews, coordinate dispute resolution, and address issues between the RR and contractors during construction.
Successes

• Jointly developed a process flow chart with railroads for processes having more complex structures.
  – Provides reliability (know when to expect deliverables and what action is to take place and when).

• Joint presentations with railroads at WSDOT design and project engineer annual conferences.

• Joint reviews on the rails.

• Assisting local agencies with railroad coordination when requested.
Successes (cont.)

- Developed escalation protocols that establish rules on when and between whom issues would be addressed.
  - Better resource use; freeing resources to address other activities and needs.

- Direct coordination and discussion between subject matter experts (attorneys, structural engineers, signal specialists, etc.) as needed.
  - Reduces the back and forth communication needed to clarify issues.
  - Creates a more collaborative environment – less contention when experts communicate.
  - Expedites work.
• Have dedicated project managers with BNSF.
  – Help deliver the large program of projects successfully.
  – Kept projects on scope, schedule and costs.

• New processes through delivery of ARRA grants.
  – Project delivery joint schedule development.
  – Risk sharing on cost at task order level.
  – Recognition of railroad requirements and timing vs. State agency.
  – BNSF committed to delivery program requirements.
  – Communications greatly improved.
  – Risk Mitigation—proactive escalation (BNSF and WSDOT).
  – Landslide Mitigation Group—full partnership with local agencies and BNSF.