



# Public Service Commission

## State of North Dakota

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### COMMISSIONERS

Kevin Cramer  
Tony Clark  
Brian P. Kalk

Executive Secretary  
Darrell Nitschke

600 E. Boulevard Ave. Dept 408  
Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0480  
Web: [www.nd.gov/psc](http://www.nd.gov/psc)  
E-mail: [ndpsc@nd.gov](mailto:ndpsc@nd.gov)  
Phone 701-328-2400  
Toll Free 1-877-245-6685  
Fax 701-328-2410  
TDD 800-366-6888 or 711

April 8, 2010

W. C. Wocken  
City Administrator  
PO Box 5503  
Bismarck, ND 58506-5503

RE: BNSF Railway Company  
Review of Private Railroad Crossings  
Application  
Our Case No. RR-10-26

Dear Mr. Wocken:

The North Dakota Public Service Commission met on April 6, 2010 to discuss the application of BNSF Railroad Company to review the Fraine Barracks crossing to determine if the crossing is a public or private crossing and, if private, whether the railroad should sound a warning device based on safety concerns of the public. Based on the facts and evidence on the record in this matter, the Commission intends to issue Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order at its May 12, 2010 meeting concluding that that the Fraine Barracks crossing is a public crossing. A draft Order is enclosed.

Before the Commission issues its order, we would like to know if the City of Bismarck has any intent to restrict access to the road that intersects with the railroad tracks, referred to as an unnamed, two-lane asphalt trail that is an extension of Shafer Street across the railroad tracks to the gated fence that controls access onto Fraine Barracks. If the City restricted access to the extension of Shafer Street, we have reason to believe that we may be able to determine that this crossing is private and that there are no safety concerns of the public that would necessitate the sound of the train's warning device.

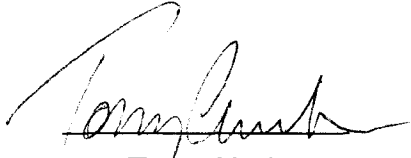
**45** **RR-10-26** Filed: 4/8/2010 Pages: 6  
**Letter to City Administrator re. Restricting Access to  
Extension of Shafer Street**

Public Service Commission

Annette Bendish

Please inform the Commission the City's plans for the extension of Shafer Street, if any, by May 7, 2010. If you have any questions please contact Annette Bendish, Commission Legal Counsel at 328-2421.

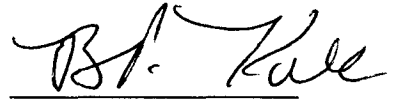
Sincerely,



Tony Clark  
Commissioner



Kevin Cramer  
Chairman



Brian P. Kalk  
Commissioner

c: Stephen Plambeck, Attorney for BNSF Railway Company  
Col. Steven A. Tabor, North Dakota National Guard

Enclosure

**STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA**  
**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

**BNSF Railway Company**  
**Review of Private Railroad Crossing**  
**Application**

**Case No. RR-10-26**

**FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW, AND ORDER**

**May 12, 2010**

**Appearances**

Commissioners Kevin Cramer, Tony Clark, and Brian P. Kalk.

Stephen W. Plambeck, Attorney, Nilles Law Firm, 201 North Fifth Street, P.O. Box 2626, Fargo, ND 58802-1525, on behalf of BNSF Railway Company.

Annette Bendish, Legal Counsel, Public Service Commission, 600 E Boulevard Ave, Dept. 408, Bismarck, ND 58505, on behalf of the Public Service Commission.

Bonny M. Fetch, Administrative Law Judge, Office of Administrative Hearings, 1701 North Ninth Street, Bismarck, ND 58501-1882, as Procedural Hearing Officer.

**Preliminary Statement**

On January 8, 2010, BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) filed an application requesting the Commission review the Fraine Barracks railroad crossing in Bismarck, North Dakota, and asked the Commission to issue an order under North Dakota Century Code section 49-10.1-21 determining whether this crossing is a public or private railroad crossing, and if private, if audible devices warning of a train's approach should be sounded at this crossing under North Dakota Century Code section 49-11-21.

On January 27, 2010, the Public Service Commission issued a Notice of Hearing scheduling a hearing for March 1, 2010, at 1:30 p.m. in the Brynhild Haugland Room, Ground Floor, State Capitol, 600 E Boulevard Ave, Bismarck, North Dakota. The Notice of Hearing identified the following issues to be considered:

1. Whether the Fraine Barracks railroad crossing (DOT #087680P) is a public or private railroad crossing as defined by Section 49-10.1-21.
2. If the Fraine Barracks railroad crossing (DOT #087680P) is a private crossing, whether the railroad should sound a warning device based on the safety concerns of the public.

On March 1, 2010, at 1:30 p.m., the public hearing was held in the Brynhild Haugland Room. Lynn Leibfried, P.E., Manager Public Projects, BNSF, presented evidence by affidavit and in response to questions from the Commission. Members of the public also offered testimony.

Having allowed all interested persons an opportunity to be heard and having heard, reviewed and considered all testimony and evidence presented, the Commission makes the following:

### **Findings of Fact**

1. In response to the amendments to North Dakota Century Code section 49-11-21 resulting from passage of 2009 House Bill 1342, BNSF has been removing whistle posts at private grade crossings in North Dakota.
2. In the process of removing those whistle posts, BNSF was unable to determine whether or not the Fraine Barracks crossing (DOT #087680P) was public or private and, if private, identified the Fraine Barracks crossing as one which the Commission may wish to review to determine whether, as a matter of public safety, the Commission in the exercise of its jurisdiction may direct that audible warnings of a train's approach be sounded.
3. The City of Bismarck identified the road that intersects with the railroad tracks as an unnamed, two-lane asphalt trail which constitutes an extension of Shafer Street north across the railroad tracks to the gated fence that controls access onto Fraine Barracks and from which the road continues through Fraine Barracks and extends out on the other side.
4. The City of Bismarck and the National Guard plow snow and otherwise maintain the road that intersects with the railroad tracks.
5. The City of Bismarck is a public authority.
6. The National Guard, as a state agency, is also a public authority.
7. Both sides of the road at the Fraine Barracks crossing are maintained by public authorities.
8. There is no barrier to prohibit the general public from traveling on the road that intersects with the railroad tracks except for a gated fence at Fraine Barracks located to the south of the Fraine Barracks crossing.
9. There are approximately 300 motor vehicle movements over the railroad tracks at the Fraine Barracks crossing each day, and about 22 trains each day.

10. The road that extends Shafer Street to the railroad tracks has a downward slope and can become slippery with snow or ice.
11. Children also play in the area, and in the winter sled downhill towards the railroad tracks.
12. Some area residents drive in the area of the Fraine Barracks crossing for purposes of obtaining access to their properties.
13. Photographs for the Fraine Barracks crossing show a curve in the tracks, some trees and other vegetation that may restrict the view of motorists and train crews as they approach the crossing.
14. There have been two incidents involving a collision between a train and a motor vehicle at the Fraine Barracks crossing; one in 1998 and the other in 1986.
15. According to the FRA, there is a 66.8% increase in the risk of train-motor vehicle collisions when train whistles are silenced.

From the foregoing Findings of Fact, the Commission now makes its:

#### **Conclusions of Law**

1. The Commission has jurisdiction under North Dakota Century Code sections 49-10.1-21 and 49-11-21 to determine if the Fraine Barracks crossing is public or private and if private, to order railroads to sound audible warning devices based on the safety concerns of the public.
2. Because the road that intersects with the Fraine Barracks crossing is maintained by a public authority on both sides, the Fraine Barracks Crossing is a public railroad crossing as defined in North Dakota Century Code section 49-11-00.1.

From the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the Commission now makes its:

#### **Order**

The Commission orders:

1. Fraine Barracks crossing (DOT #087680P) is a public railroad crossing, and as such, federal whistle regulations apply.

**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

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**Tony Clark  
Commissioner**

**Kevin Cramer  
Chairman**

**Brian P. Kalk  
Commissioner**

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