



City of Blaine

2021 Legislative Priorities

Addressing Train/Vehicle Delays at Bell Road (SR 548)

Bell Road (SR 548) connects the communities of Birch Bay and Semiahmoo to downtown Blaine and Interstate-5. There are serious local traffic delays on this roadway caused by the Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System (VACIS). The VACIS is operated by US Homeland Security to monitor goods leaving or coming into United States from Canada. Cargo trains going through the VACIS move very slowly, and block traffic across Bell Road (SR 548). This traffic backs up on to Interstate 5 at Exit 274. A grade separated crossing over the train tracks is the ideal solution to address this congestion, enhance public safety, connect Blaine with Birch Bay and Semiahmoo, promote economic development, and support the movement of goods into and out of the United States. However, evaluation of the project has uncovered significant engineering challenges, local access issues, and an unexpectedly high construction cost. Based on WSDOT evaluation of alternatives, the City supports construction of an at-grade, signalized intersection with channelization improvements (bypass lanes) to improve traffic flow and reduce delays.

The City of Blaine requests that the Legislature authorize a total of \$3,000,000 for the project, including a project scope change to utilize the existing \$1,550,000 currently allocated to the grade separation project, and an additional \$1,450,000. The City applied to the Transportation Improvement Board Grant Program for the remaining funds but was unsuccessful. In a separate effort, the City is utilizing \$475,000 of combined TBD revenue and WSDOT local programs funding for lane improvements that will set the stage for the signalization project.

Downtown Blaine Revitalization Project

The City of Blaine requests \$1.0 million to supplement \$700,000 allocated by the City for downtown commercial district improvements to support the business community. The project includes pedestrian-oriented amenities to reinforce downtown as the heart of the community and a tourism destination. The place making effort builds on the City's "Blaine-by-the-Sea" tourism branding campaign. The project replaces aging benches and trash cans; adds recycling receptacles; installs new flower planters, street furniture, bike racks; and constructs two gateway arches to anchor historic downtown. For safety and ADA accessibility, the project replaces 7,300 feet of aging and uneven sidewalk, along with removal of select street trees that have contributed to sidewalk buckling. Concurrent updates to utilities are also expected.

Marine Drive Reconstruction Project

The City of Blaine and the Port of Bellingham request \$4 million in transportation funding to reconstruct Marine Drive. The easternmost section of Marine Drive has been closed to vehicle traffic since 2015. This segment of road serves as access to Jorgensen Public Pier and is a component of the breakwater for Blaine Harbor. Access to adjacent fish processing industries has been compromised due to the road closure. The City and the Port of Bellingham are coordinating on an effort to reconstruct the roadway to ensure access to the pier and protection of the harbor. Under the proposed project, a new truck-compatible roadway will serve the industrial shipyard. A single vehicle lane, a bike/ped lane, and a bulkhead will continue for the final 300 feet to provide access to the public pier.

Local Transportation Revenue

Cities throughout the state lack financial resources to adequately maintain and operate the city-owned transportation system. The City of Blaine asks that the state provide increased local funding tools to meet city transportation needs. As a border community, the City of Blaine is unique from other communities. Visitors

from Canada frequently travel into the City of Blaine and utilize Blaine's infrastructure without contributing to the tax base. To address this, the state previously authorized border communities to impose a "border gas tax" with voter approval. The City of Blaine, Sumas and Nooksack have utilized this authority. One option to increase local funding tools to meet city transportation needs would be to authorize these communities to increase the border gas tax by another cent.

REET Flexibility

The City of Blaine supports flexibility in the use of Real Estate Excise Tax to allow the funds to be used for maintenance and preservation of capital facilities during COVID-19 recovery. The City requests a minimum three-year allowance, sunseting in December 2023, to use REET excise tax for such maintenance and preservation in addition to capital construction. During these trying times it is important that the city maintain existing infrastructure before purchasing or constructing new infrastructure.

RCO Aquatic Lands Enhancement Program

The City of Blaine supports funding for the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) to grant awards for the 2021-23 biennium. The City submitted a grant application and is ranked number 13 to receive an ALEA award to rebuild the beach at Marine Park. This project will create near-shore habitat for fish and other wildlife, create public access, and protect infrastructure and park improvements.

The City of Blaine supports the legislative priorities of the Association of Washington Cities.