

## **Round Two, What's the Scoop....More Trains, Coal Trains, and Oil Trains.....**

*By Dave Earling, Mayor*

In my previous column I said I would let you know how we are working to deal with our long-term problem of increased train traffic in Edmonds. So here goes...

First off, let's all understand that Burlington Northern-Santa Fe owns a lot of land and right-of-way in Edmonds. They have control of that land and the right-of-way which runs along the coastline in perpetuity (forever). And at some point (they are not clear when), they will build a second track on their right-of-way through our city to accommodate projected growth. Train traffic will increase in Edmonds.

That projected growth comes from a variety of influences. Like it or not, we are increasingly part of a growing global economy. Add to that just good old-fashioned domestic growth in Washington and the United States. People and products need to get where they need to go. And while, yes, there will always be people who want to keep things the same – comfortable and without change (I am one of them). However, in this case, all indications are that change is inevitable.

The 2005 study mentioned in the last column shows a potential increase from 35 to 104 trains a day by 2030. In the last two years, we have heard first about coal trains and more lately about oil trains. And, as you know, we already have oil and coal trains coming through town leading to more and longer trains... and the number of trains will grow. This creates delays for people traveling across the tracks, something that is not only inconvenient but raises serious safety concerns, as well as environmental and economic impacts.

The question is – what has been or can be done to address this long-term issue?

We have been working to raise public and governmental awareness on a number of fronts. The City Council has passed Resolutions of concern about growing train traffic, principally focusing on safety concerns. Councilmembers Strom Peterson and Adrienne Fraley-Monillas have been actively involved regarding environmental issues. And, the City Council has supported my recommendation to join with other cities in a state-wide effort to address coal train health issues and freight train volume concerns.

We have also met with several state legislators and have been invited by those legislators to testify before them on the various train-volume, at-grade-crossing and environmental issues facing Edmonds and the state. In addition, a group of legislators visited Edmonds last year and saw first-hand what we face daily as three trains came through, in a 20-minute period, while legislators were standing at Main Street and Railroad Avenue.

I have met locally with Burlington Northern- Santa Fe (BNSF) and the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), as well as members of our Federal Delegation. More recently, I was part of a panel in Everett focused on addressing increased train volume and safety concerns.

The state-wide concern over increasing train traffic has also become a high priority for the Association of Washington Cities (AWC). I serve on the legislative committee and the newly formed rail task force. AWC has been working with the state and federal officials seeking answers and solutions for the issues that various cities across the state face. AWC will work the train volume issue into advocating for a state-wide transportation package. Candidly though, a transportation package this coming year in the legislature is a long shot.

So, we have accomplished the task of raising public and governmental leadership's awareness. There is recognition by legislative and Federal elected leaders, BNSF, AWC, WSDOT, and the region, that train traffic and safety are a growing problem that needs to be addressed in Edmonds and the state. The question for us now is: how do we maintain access to and from the waterfront, our parks, the Port, Senior Center, SR 104, the ferry system, our mainland side and our citizens and at the same time face up to a growing rail problem.

There is in fact, no easy answer. Many citizens have indicated they are interested in a train trench, others advocate for an overpass or underpass. Frankly, I don't have a preference. I know we cannot just sit on our hands and allow history to happen to us. We just need to solve the problem.

We will once again seek dollars from the state level to do an Alternatives Analysis to come up with a variety of potential solutions which Edmonds, the region and the state find acceptable. Whatever the proper answer may be, it will take years to accumulate the dollars needed to realize a project.

In closing, I want to remind everyone about the upcoming Town Hall to discuss this issue. It is scheduled for Thursday, October 2nd, at 6:30 pm in the Plaza Room at the top of the Library. We will have speakers from the environmental community, BNSF, Puget Sound Regional Council and SSA Marine. We will also have representatives from Fire District 1 and WSDOT in attendance. I hope you can join us.