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Port Achieves Major Rail Infrastructure Milestone and Secures Federal Grant for Future Improvements

RICHLAND, Wash. — Following the completion of major construction projects, Port of Benton's railroad track has achieved Class 1 track status, enabling greater flexibility in serving industrial rail customers without restrictions on the type or number of railcars.

Originally acquired from the U.S. Department of Energy in 1998, the rail line spans from the Union Pacific mainline near Columbia Center Mall in Kennewick to the north end of the Horn Rapids Industrial Park. The region's industries ship the second-highest tonnage of goods (primarily frozen fries and feed for local dairies) in the state—1.3 million tons annually—on the port's rail line.

Since 2015, the port has invested substantial resources into revitalizing the track. The most recent improvements include the replacement of five road crossings and the installation of 3,400 new rail ties.

Additionally, the port is in the process of contracting for a \$9.56 million federal grant through the Rebuilding America Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program, now referred to as the 2025 Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) program. Combined with \$2.4 million in matching funds from the port, the grant will support replacing approximately 4 miles of undersized, 75-plus-year-old track, upgrading two additional rail crossings and installing roughly 9,000 additional ties.

These upgrades, scheduled for completion by the end of 2027, will allow the track classification to increase to Class 2 status, enabling train speeds of up to 25 mph and significantly improving safety for both trains and the public. Vehicle delays at crossings are expected to drop dramatically, from over 15 minutes to as little as 4 minutes.

"This investment marks a transformative moment for our region's infrastructure," said Diahann Howard, Port of Benton executive director. "We're not only improving safety and efficiency but also laying the groundwork for future economic growth."

The port is hosting a rail information night on Monday, October 20, to provide an overview of the planned upgrades. The event will be held from 4:30 to 6 p.m. at the port's rail facility, 2579 Stevens Drive, Richland.

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