



**City
of
Leavenworth**

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ICICLE STATION PROJECT RECEIVES CRITICAL NODS OF APPROVAL

The City of Leavenworth has been anxiously awaiting a response from the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway and Amtrak for several months on the proposed Icicle Station project that would bring daily passenger rail service to Washington's 'Bavarian Village.'

The wait is over.

BNSF recently sent a letter to the City approving of the economic development project subject to several conditions that City officials have been evaluating while awaiting word from Amtrak. The BNSF letter was followed yesterday by Amtrak's formal approval for daily service to Leavenworth on the Empire Builder route.

"These announcements from BNSF and Amtrak are just incredible," said Councilmember Rob Eaton, who initiated the project four years ago and has spearheaded it since. "I am very excited to move forward with the City Council, Amtrak, BNSF, and our regional and state partners to realize this tremendous opportunity for the Leavenworth community."

The most notable of the BNSF conditions on project approval includes the City's acknowledgement that BNSF may eventually eliminate passenger rail service on the Stevens Pass line. The letter also requested that the City and Amtrak, even though the City does not play a role in the independent negotiations between BNSF, Amtrak, and a private tour company for snow train operations, agree that the daily passenger service to Leavenworth would eliminate the need for the annual snow trains. BNSF would, however, consider snow train requests on an annual basis based on capacity constraints.

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The City Council will discuss the BNSF and Amtrak decisions at their February 13 meeting. "We will continue to deliberately weigh the potential impacts of these conditions, but I am confident that the City will effectively work through them toward this enormous community benefit," said Eaton.

Eaton points out that the migration of passenger rail to Stampede Pass would require a significant capital investment on the part of BNSF and the State of Washington to provide the required signalization in what is currently referred to as 'dark territory.' The City's understanding is that BNSF signalization of Stampede Pass would not likely occur in the next 10-15 years, and would be influenced by a variety of factors. Further, there is a possibility that the signalization won't occur at all.

"We certainly do not wish to pursue an Icicle Station investment of up to \$1 million without being assured of a substantial return on that investment," said Eaton. "From working on this project over the past four years, I am very confident that Icicle Station would operate for at least 10-15 years, and even as long as 20-30 years, if not longer, with the return to the community significant." A comparative Amtrak station in Whitefish Montana generates a \$5.7 million annual impact to the Whitefish community.

Leavenworth Mayor Mel Wyles was also thrilled by the news, saying that he "could not be more pleased," not only by the BNSF and Amtrak decisions, but by the "tireless work of Councilmember Eaton to reach this huge milestone." Mayor Wyles also emphasized the benefit daily service would provide to local residents needing to travel over the mountain passes during the winter months.

As Eaton prepares to address the City Council with the Mayor and Staff, he reiterates his confidence in the projected annual economic impact to Leavenworth based on current Amtrak Empire Builder ridership, the parallel example of Amtrak service to Whitefish Montana, and the considerable interest the project has generated, even if the passenger service terminates in 10-15 years. "The marketing possibilities and potential partnerships are virtually endless," he said.

To date, a little over \$210,000 has been raised for the project, an amount that would be greatly augmented if the City is awarded a pending Regional Mobility grant. The total cost of the project is estimated to be between \$750,000 and \$1 million.