

High Priority Items for the 2016 State Legislature



The Greater Spokane Valley Chamber is dedicated to building and promoting collaborative partnerships that stimulate economic prosperity and serve the common good. The "BIG 5 for the Greater Spokane Valley" is our community engagement effort to identify and drive community-wide initiatives that stimulate community vitality and nurture economic prosperity for the Greater Spokane Valley region. These legislative priorities serve as critical needs for our region touching on each of these community identified initiatives and our commitment to nurture and safeguard the vitality of our vibrant Spokane Valley and the region. Learn more at spokanevalleychamber.org

Improve the Competiveness of Our Business Climate

- 1. Bridging the Valley** – The access of industrial zone land, transportation of goods, and the timely performance of emergency service providers are significantly enhanced by providing for grade separations of automobile/rail intersections.
- 2. Transportation Funding Request-Barker Road/BNSF Grade Separation (overpass/underpass)** – Our community's highest priority Bridging the Valley project, funding the remaining \$19.5 million construction of a \$29.2 million grade separation of the BNSF line near Barker and Trent Roads will provide the necessary access to over 500 acres of industrial land, contributing over \$2 billion in economic output to our region and state.
- 3. Community Empowerment Zones** – Expanding the CEZ to the Spokane County wide boundary helps our community attract employers necessary to meet our ever evolving technological capabilities, including those in the health care, aviation and other emerging market sectors.
- 4. Workers Compensation** – We encourage our state's legislature and governor to initiate reforms to encourage efficiencies in both cost and performance, increasing our communities and state's business climate and competitiveness.
- 5. Current Minimum Wage** – Our Chamber supports the current minimum wage legislation as being a fair total compensation package providing for a level of work effort, complexity, accommodation for youth and other training.
- 6. Nuisance Abatement Lien Priority Amendment** – Our Chamber supports the City of Spokane Valley's efforts to modify existing statutes pertaining to nuisance properties, thus allowing that city and other cities to improve their ability to provide for safe, healthy and hazard-free neighborhoods.

Community Projects:

- 1. Rail Traffic Emergency Preparedness** – Our Chamber urges our elected officials to collaborate with rail carriers to improve emergency preparedness and provide for funding for training and equipment.

Education:

1. We encourage our state legislators and governor to collaborate and lead all efforts to meet our state's duty to provide for the funding of public education pursuant to its duties under the state constitution, appropriately considering the state's revenues, differences in the state's geographical areas, local operational costs, capital costs and local revenue capabilities and therefore providing for appropriate levy equalization.

Approved: 12-03-15



Improve the Competiveness of Our Business Climate

1. Bridging the Valley – The Spokane Valley Chamber supports continuing the Bridging the Valley project to remove at-grade railroad crossings due to increased rail traffic in the Valley with particular emphasis on the Barker Road project as the most immediate priority. This Barker Road Grade Separation project is intended to promote economic growth, traffic movement, traffic safety and train whistle noise abatement. Barker Road is one of the primary freight routes from State Route 290 (Trent) to Interstate 90 for trucks traveling in eastern Washington and to and from north Idaho and Canada.

The projected economic impact of this project would be \$40.4 million dollars of new general tax funds to Washington State; 9,800 new jobs in the State; and the City of Spokane Valley would receive \$12.3 million in additional taxes. Various entities plus the City of Spokane Valley have already committed \$8.2 million dollars to this project. In addition, the railroad crossing at Pines Road (Highway 27) just south of Trent (Highway 290) is another major roadblock that impedes the movement of freight. This project would also increase the viability of business development in our region and is of great economic importance.

2. Transportation Funding Request-Barker Road/BNSF Grade Separation (overpass/underpass) – The Spokane Valley Chamber supports identifying future funding opportunities for the Barker Road/BNSF Grade Separation project. As the state experiences an increase in rail traffic, this particular intersection will become increasingly congested and dangerous. This project will separate vehicle traffic from train traffic and remove the at-grade rail crossing. The total anticipated cost is \$29.2 million. The City of Spokane Valley (“City”) has secured \$5.84 million from the Washington State Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board and the project has been identified as regionally significant by the Inland Pacific Hub Study. The City is able to contribute \$1.294 million. Contribution from BNSF will be \$346,000 and from the 2009 Earmark is \$720,000. The City is seeking \$21 million in future funding for the Barker Road/BNSF Grade Separation. Additional benefits include: improve the level of service (LOS) from ‘F’ at this intersection, allowing for new development in the industrial-zoned portion of the City which cannot currently occur because the intersection has a LOS that is failing; improve emergency access; and help to address concerns about coal trains, including impeded traffic flow, increased whistle noise, and train-vehicle conflict safety.

Economic output, jobs, and taxes

- \$2 billion in total economic output in the state (\$980 million in direct impacts)
- 9,800 new jobs supported in the state (3,300 direct job impacts)
- \$12.3 million in new general fund taxes to the City (25 year present value at 4%)
- \$50.8 million in new general fund taxes to Washington State (25 year present value at 4%)

3. Community Empowerment Zones – Reauthorize the Community Empowerment Zone (CEZ) to original language to allow projects to be built throughout counties with a Community Empowerment Zone, as long as a person from the Empowerment Zone is hired for every \$750,000 in investment. The CEZ will allow for a deferral/ exemption of the state's portion of sales and use tax on construction

4. Workers Compensation – Clarify and streamline the system to increase efficiencies, decrease industrial premiums, impose more stringent verification and regulations processes, end duplication of benefits, and:

- Expand existing compromise and release statute
- Allow companies of all size and wealth assets to become self-insureds
- Allow companies to contract with private auditors
- Seek alternative funding for vocational rehab and workforce training programs



5. Current Minimum Wage – We support the current minimum wage as appropriate for a state as geographically and economically diverse as Washington. We caution those who desire an increase in minimum wage to carefully consider both the intended and unintended consequences to our communities. Should action be taken increase minimum wage, we support the legislature sending a referendum to the people which includes:

- A clause for pre-emption - which prohibits future changes by local municipalities.
- A phase in period of three to five years.
- A calculation of minimum wage which includes an employee's total compensation (i.e., health care benefits, L&I, parking, transit, meals, etc.)
- A teen wage to address our high rate of teenage unemployment.
- A training wage with set timelines for our entry level or unskilled workforce.

6. Nuisance Abatement Lien Priority Amendment – Safe, healthy, and hazard-free neighborhoods are a priority for citizens, and necessary for good economic development. Nuisance properties seriously detract from the property values of the surrounding properties. To support the effort of having more-livable communities, municipalities need better tools to enforce cleanup, and then obtain reimbursement of the costs of cleaning up such properties.

Current law does not allow municipalities to get a first priority lien to enforce collection against property owners, and banks can eliminate the liens through foreclosure. While many property owners are responsible, our municipalities need assistance with those who are not. The Spokane Valley Chamber supports legislation that accomplishes the following:

- Makes the first \$2,000 of court-ordered cleanup costs a special assessment, and thus a first priority lien collectable through a contract with the local county treasurer; and
- Any additional cleanup expenditures incurred by a municipality would be a regular priority lien (recovered only after other lien holders are paid).

This legislation is critical to support the quality of life and ongoing economic development in the Greater Spokane Valley.

Community Projects:

1. Rail Traffic Emergency Preparedness – Given the dramatic increase in oil train traffic through the heart of the Spokane Valley, we urge elected officials to bring rail carriers to the table to create collaborative comprehensive safety plans.

This effort would include funding for training and equipment to strengthen emergency preparedness and response to address this serious health and safety concern.

Education:

1. Invest in the state's paramount duty to fully fund HB 2261/SHB 2776, by providing ample funding for:

- Pupil Transportation
- Maintenance, Supplies and Operating Costs (MSOCs)
- Fair compensation that does not unconstitutionally rely on local levies.
- K-3 Class Size Reduction
- Full-Day Kindergarten

It is vital that the Legislature follow through on restoration funding cuts in a manner that maintains local flexibility.

2. Support local effort assistance (LEA) – The continuation of levy equalization is imperative for our school districts. Local effort assistance, or levy equalization, provides vital funding for educational opportunities both inside and outside the classroom. It supports programs and experiences that keep students engaged in school activities such as band and choir, athletic programs, gifted programs, special education assurance, and others.

3. Fund capital construction and state match – Importantly, this funding supports quality learning and teaching and provides the opportunity for students to learn in safe, modern facilities.

Funding for state match for school construction as a means to provide modernized schools, after a local school district community has voted in favor of a school construction bond, is essential. This includes matching funding for any classrooms that are required to provide full-day kindergarten and lower K-3 class sizes. The funding supports investments made by local voters, in the process creating local jobs and helping the economy in whole. It is also a priority for the state to fund the construction of additional classrooms needed to implement class size reduction and full-day kindergarten goals.

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