

# Highway 54 / BNSF Grade Separation

## Athol, ID

### Project Location

Highway 54 is a two lane east-west minor-arterial road in Athol, Idaho. It crosses the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) mainline near Old Highway 95. Highway 54 currently carries approximately 3,160 vehicles per day. The BNSF line carries between 30 and 50 trains per day. The Highway 54 crossing lies one-half mile west of US-95, and is currently protected by standard railroad gates and signals.



### Project Description

This project proposes to reconstruct Highway 54 to pass **under** three BNSF tracks. As the Union Pacific Railroad trains will be running on the BNSF tracks, this project has the added benefit of allowing the Idaho Transportation Department and the City of Athol to petition for closure of the UPRR at-grade crossing just 1,100 feet to the west. The additional UPRR / Highway 54 grade crossing closure would further improve public safety.

This area is projected to grow significantly over the next 30 years, increasing traffic on Highway 54 by 50 percent. This project will widen Highway 54 from two to four lanes under the tracks. Impacts to existing business along Highway 54 will be minimal.

### Proposed Schedule

The Design Report, completed in December 2004, is based on guidance generated from a preliminary study done in 2001. The Design Report incorporates comments from the railroads, City of Athol, Idaho Transportation Department, and the public. Environmental approval for the entire Bridging the Valley project was received in August 2006. Final design and construction will begin when funds are available.

### Summary of Benefits

When completed, the Bridging the Valley (BTV) project will separate vehicle traffic from train traffic in the 42 mile corridor between Spokane, Washington and Athol, Idaho. By removing all at-grade rail crossings, Bridging the Valley will:

- Improve public safety by reducing rail / vehicle collisions;
- Improve emergency access to residents and businesses along the corridor;
- Eliminate waiting time for vehicles at rail crossings;
- Reduce noise levels—no more train whistles near crossings;
- Improve traffic flow due to separated grade crossings; and
- Enhance development opportunities with a single rail corridor served by the region's largest railroads.

