

## **State Highway 54 Underpass**

### **Removal of UPRR & BNSF At-Grade Railroad Crossings**

Overview: Athol, Idaho, is a small community in northern Kootenai County. The city is bisected by State Highway 54 (SH-54), which runs east-west through the community, and crosses both the BNSF trans-continental rail line – which moves freight from west coast ports to Chicago and east – and the Union Pacific railroad – which also provides access from west coast ports into Canada and destinations on the east coast. The two railroads closely parallel each other through Athol and, with a combination of 75+ trains per day on both lines, creates a challenge for the community and vicinity, in terms of crossing delay, safety, and noise exposure to the public. SH-54 connects to US-95 on the east side of the city and is identified on the State and National Strategic Freight Plan, as it provides access to the wood products industry, including the Chilco Mill (the largest lumber mill in Idaho which provides lumber products to retailers, such as Home Depot and Lowe’s, as far south and east as Florida). SH-54 also provides access to recreational/tourist areas, such as Farragut State Park and Spirit Lake.

Description: Eliminate two (2) at-grade railroad crossings with the construction of an underpass on SH-54 to reduce travel delay, enhance safety, and improve reliability on the freight and goods system, while reducing noise exposure from train whistle blowing at the two crossings.

Financial Strategy: Athol does not have the financial strength to support this regionally significant project. As SH-54 is on the State and National Freight Network, there are some opportunities for Federal participation, and participation by ITD through State and Federal Freight formula funding. Although Athol is eligible for two (2) or more grant programs, currently selected projects are programmed out through 2027. In addition, ITD would need to conduct this project, as it involves their highways and two railroads. Significant regional/local financial contributions will be necessary in order to meet the objective of building this underpass in a timely manner, which will address existing deficiencies and its importance to the timber and tourism industries. As a State highway, the Local Option funds would provide additional Local funds to advance the project. The use of Federal funds is highly likely through INFRA, BUILD or CHRISSY competitive grant programs.