



Legislative Department Seattle City Council Memorandum

Date: July 5, 2013
To: Transportation Committee Members
From: Dan Eder
Subject: **C.B. 117819 - BNSF Kiosks and OCRs**

C.B. 117819 would create a new permit allowing BNSF to construct, operate and maintain certain traffic equipment in city right-of-way. BNSF plans to install Biotech Reader Kiosks (“Kiosks”) and Optical Character Recognition Camera Portals (“OCRs”) on existing foundations. The Kiosks and OCRs will work in conjunction with BNSF’s Automated Gate System to identify shipping containers on trucks as they enter the Seattle International Gateway Yard.

According to SDOT, the exclusive purpose and use of the equipment is for BNSF to document the arrival of shipping containers and to match each container up to the appropriate shipping instructions in BNSF’s database. Trucks go through the OCR portals and check-in at the Kiosks; trucks will stop at the Kiosks before proceeding into the intermodal facility. Should a private car mistakenly enter the OCR portal and the Kiosk lane, the equipment will determine that there are no freight-specific identification markings, and BNSF’s database will capture the incident as “an unknown piece of equipment.”

In March, Council passed Ordinance 124142 requiring every City department that operates surveillance equipment to submit written data management and operational protocols for Council review and approval. The Ordinance specifically states: “‘Surveillance equipment’ does not include ... a camera installed in or on any vehicle or along a public right-of-way intended to record traffic patterns and/or traffic violations, ...”

The proposed BNSF Kiosks and OCRs do not appear to be the kind of equipment requiring surveillance protocols. First, SDOT indicates that the Kiosks and OCRs will not be operated by City department staff; rather, the equipment will be operated exclusively by BNSF personnel. Second, the equipment appears to be intended to record traffic patterns, specifically the arrival and identification of freight containers to facilitate the flow of freight operations at BNSF’s Seattle International Gateway Yard.