

ATHERTON FAIR OAKS QUIET ZONE

At 12:01 AM on Monday, June 13, 2016, the Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone was officially established by the Town of Atherton. Since 2005, communities across the United States have been able to establish Quiet Zones which is a Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) exemption to the rule requiring trains to sound their horns when approaching public highway-rail grade crossings.

Federal regulation requires the sounding of locomotive horns 15-20 seconds before entering public highway-rail grade crossings and no more than one-quarter mile in advance of the crossing. The prohibited use of train horns within Quiet Zones only applies to trains approaching and entering crossings and does not apply to train horn use within passenger station areas such as the Atherton Caltrain Station. Train horn restrictions within Quiet Zones also do not apply in emergency situations.

Accordingly, it is important to understand that Quiet Zone regulations do not eliminate the use of locomotive horns at public highway-rail grade crossings. A more appropriate description of a designated Quiet Zone would be a “reduced train horn area”.



Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone – The Town of Atherton has two public highway-rail grade crossings, Fair Oaks Lane and Watkins Avenue. The Fair Oaks Lane crossing consists of a 4-quadrant gate system and the Watkins Avenue crossing has a 2-quadrant gate system.



The 4-quadrant gate system provides a higher level of safety since gates are installed across all roadway lanes which prevents aggressive drivers from entering the rail corridor. Since the 4-quadrant gate system does not allow cars to physically enter the rail corridor, it is an approved FRA Supplemental Safety Measure which qualified the Fair Oaks Lane crossing for a Quiet Zone.

Per regulations established and governed by the FRA, as the Public Authority responsible for Fair Oaks Lane, the Town of Atherton has the authority to establish the Quiet Zone after following a specific process of notifying and soliciting comments from railroad operators and State and Federal agencies responsible for railroad operations and safety, documenting responses to comments, sending the Notice of Establishment, and installing required roadway signage.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Quiet Zone ?

A Quiet Zone is a section of a rail line at least one half mile in length that contains a public highway-rail grade crossing where the sounding of locomotive train horns are prohibited. The prohibited use of train horns only applies to trains approaching and entering crossings and does not apply to train horn use within passenger stations. Train horns may be sounded in emergency situations or to comply with other railroad or Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) rules. Quiet Zone regulations do not eliminate the use of locomotive horns at public highway-rail grade crossings. Therefore a more appropriate description of a designated Quiet Zone would be a “reduced train horn area”.

Why Do Trains Sound Their Horns ?

In response to an increase in train/automobile collisions, in 1994 Congress enacted a law that required the FRA to issue a Federal Regulation requiring the sounding of locomotive horns at public highway-rail grade crossings. It also gave the FRA the ability to provide for exceptions by allowing communities under some circumstances to establish “quiet zones”.

The Train Horn Rule became effective in June 2005. The rule set nationwide standards for the sounding of train horns at public highway-rail grade crossings. The FRA has very specific requirements as to when, where, how long, and how loud a train must sound its horn.

According to FRA rules, train horns must:

- Be within 96 and 110 decibels
- Sound at least 15 seconds but no more than 20 seconds before reaching a crossing
- Sound no more than ¼ of a mile from a crossing if the train is traveling faster than 60 mph

Who is Responsible for Establishing a Quiet Zone ?

Per FRA Rule, a Quiet Zone is established by the Public Authority responsible for traffic control or law enforcement at the public highway-rail grade crossing. The Town of Atherton is the Public Authority for the Fair Oaks Lane and Watkins Avenue rail grade crossings.

When was the Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone Established ?

12:01 AM, June 13, 2016

Is the Atherton Caltrain Station Part of the Quiet Zone ?

No. The Town can only designate a Quiet Zone at crossings which the Town is the Public Authority. The Atherton Station and pedestrian platform crossings are Caltrain facilities.

Is the Sounding of Train Horns Now Prohibited Through the Town of Atherton ?

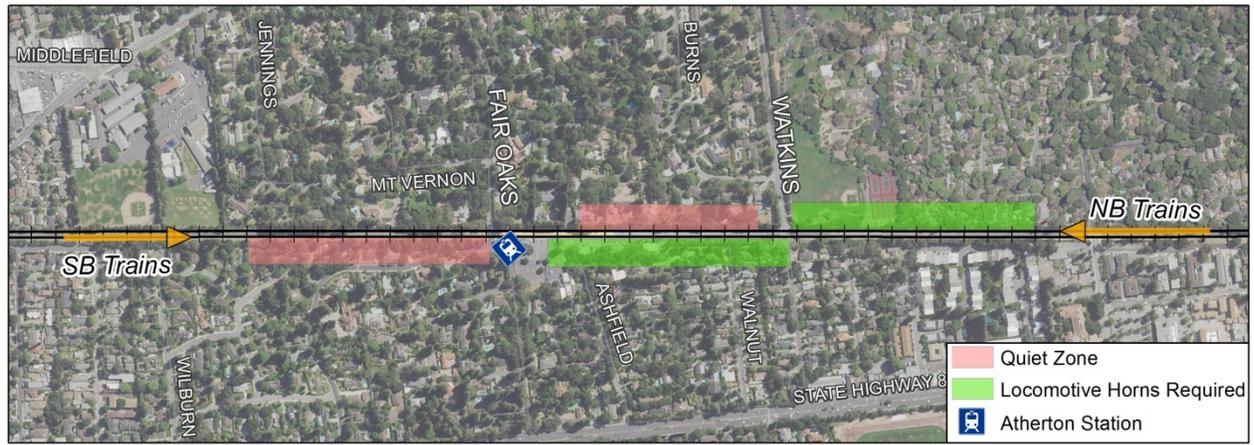
No. Trains are still required to sound locomotive horns as they approach the Watkins Avenue rail grade crossing. Trains are also allowed to sound horns as they pass through the Atherton Station and platform crossings

Specific to the Town of Atherton, When are the Sounding of Train Horns Prohibited, Required, and Allowed ?

Locomotive horns are **prohibited** as trains approach the Fair Oaks Lane crossing. For southbound trains, locomotive horns are prohibited north of Fair Oaks Lane. For northbound trains, locomotive horns are prohibited beginning ¼ mile south of Fair Oaks **with the exception** of train horns being allowed for the Atherton Station and platform crossings

Sounding of locomotive horns are **required** for trains approaching the Watkins Avenue rail grade crossing. Southbound trains begin sounding horns ¼ mile north of Watkins Avenue. Northbound trains begin sounding horns ¼ mile south of Watkins Avenue.

Locomotive horns are **allowed** for trains passing through Atherton Station and platform crossings



Are Quiet Zones Safe ?

Each crossing within a Quiet Zone must be equipped with additional safety equipment prior to the consideration and eligibility of establishing a Quiet Zone. The additional safety equipment provided at the Fair Oaks Lane rail grade crossing is the installation of a 4 quadrant gate system which provides a physical barrier to prevent cars from entering the railroad corridor. The 4 quadrant gate system is an approved FRA Supplemental Safety Measure which provides increased safety benefits which minimize risk of vehicle/train collisions.

Did the Town Assume Any Potential Liability by Establishing the Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone ?

The Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone does not impose additional liability on the Town. As explained above, the FRA only allows Quiet Zones at crossings where a Supplemental Safety Measure has been installed. In the case of the Fair Oaks crossing, the existing 4-quadrant gate system prevents vehicles from entering the rail corridor when a train is approaching, eliminating the need for trains to blow their horns in warning. Thus the higher level of safety afforded by the 4-quadrant gate system makes establishment of a Quiet Zone possible without incurring additional liability.

Can the Town Create a Quiet Zone at the Watkins Railroad Crossing ?

Not at this time. The Watkins rail grade crossing currently does not have the required Supplemental Safety Measure to make this crossing Quiet Zone eligible. The Town of Atherton has funded an engineering study to determine the feasibility and cost to construct a 4-quadrant gate system at the Watkins Avenue crossing. Once completed, funding and construction will need to be coordinated with and through Caltrain.

How Can I Report Violations of the Quiet Zone ?

Yes. Quiet Zone violations can be reported to the FRA using the following online form:

<https://www.fra.dot.gov/app/violationreport>

Where Can I Learn More About How Quiet Zones are Established ?

The FRA Guide to Quiet Zone Establishment can be found at

<https://www.fra.dot.gov/eLib/Details/L04781>.