



Item No. 10 Town of Atherton

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT – CONSENT AGENDA

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
GEORGE RODERICKS, CITY MANAGER**

FROM: ROBERT OVADIA, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

DATE: FEBRUARY 16, 2022

SUBJECT: FAIR OAKS LANE QUIET ZONE EXTENSION – NOTICE OF INTENT

RECOMMENDATION

Authorize staff to issue a Notice of Intent to extend the existing Quiet Zone at Fair Oaks Lane through the Watkins Avenue rail crossing.

BACKGROUND

Under the Train Horn Rule (49 CFR Part 222), locomotive engineers must begin to sound train horns at least 15 seconds, and no more than 20 seconds, in advance of all public grade crossings. If a train is traveling faster than 60 mph, engineers will not sound the horn until it is within ¼ mile of the crossing, even if the advance warning is less than 15 seconds. Train horns must be sounded in a standardized pattern of 2 long, 1 short and 1 long blasts. The pattern must be repeated or prolonged until the lead locomotive or lead cab car occupies the grade crossing. The rule does not stipulate the durations of long and short blasts.

The Rule also provides an opportunity for localities nationwide to mitigate the effects of train horn noise by establishing “quiet zones.” “No horn” restriction which may have existed prior to the establishment of the rule may be qualified to be “pre-rule quiet zones”. In a quiet zone, railroads have been directed to cease the routine sounding their horns when approaching public highway-rail grade crossings. Train horns may still be used in emergency situations or to comply with other Federal regulations or railroad operating rules. Localities desiring to establish a quiet zone are first required to mitigate the increased risk caused by the absence of a horn.

The Town of Atherton has two public highway-rail grade crossings, Fair Oaks Lane and Watkins Avenue. The Fair Oaks Lane crossing is equipped with 4-quadrant gates 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 entering and exiting the crossing which fully block the crossing in the event of an approaching train. The 4-quadrant gate system prohibits cars from physically entering the crossing. It is an approved FRA Supplemental Safety Measure which qualified the Fair Oaks Lane crossing for Quiet Zone establishment.

After following a specific process, including the issuance of a Notice of Intent to establish a Quiet Zone (notifying and soliciting comments from railroad operators and State and Federal agencies responsible for railroad operations and safety), documenting responses to comments, installing required supplemental safety measures, and sending the Notice of Establishment, the Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone was officially established by the Town of Atherton on Monday June 13, 2016.

DISCUSSION

In October 2020, the City Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding with the Joint Powers Board operating Caltrain (JPB) allowing for the closure of the Atherton Station. The MOU included provisions for the JPB to design and implement safety improvements at the Watkins Avenue rail crossing and would support the establishment of a Quiet Zone at the crossing.

In November 2021, Town staff participated in a diagnostic meeting with Caltrain, CPUC and FRA regarding the proposed Watkins Avenue rail crossing safety improvements. All are aware of the intent to implement a Quiet Zone at the crossing. Design of the safety improvements is approximately 65% complete and include the upgrade from a two (2) quadrant gate system to a for (4) quadrant gate system, separation of the pedestrian gate from the vehicle gate, pedestrian crossing improvements, pedestrian crossing lighting improvements, Quiet Zone compliant advance warning signage, and vehicle intrusion detection withing the crossing. Pursuant to the MOU, the schedule calls for completion of the improvements by December 2023.

As noted above, the first step in formally advising rail operators and regulators of the intent to establish a Quiet Zone is to issue a Notice of Intent to advise and solicit feedback regarding the proposed Quiet Zone. As a quiet Zone has already been established in Atherton at the Fair Oaks Lane Crossing, with the closure of the Atherton Station and the implementation of the proposed supplemental safety improvements at the Watkins Avenue Crossing, the Notice would be to extend the existing Quiet Zone through the Watkins Avenue Crossing upon completion of the improvements.

POLICY FOCUS

The Town Council discussion should focus on the desire to extend the existing Fair Oaks Lane Quiet Zone through the Watkins Avenue Crossing, which is consistent with the Town Priorities Regarding the Caltrain line and Corridor.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is limited financial impact related to issuing the Notice of Intent.

GOAL ALIGNMENT

This Report and its contents are in alignment with the following Council Policy Goals:

- Goal B – Preserve Small Town Character and Quality of Life
- Goal D – Manage Circulation and Improve Safety

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting in print and electronically. Information about the project is also disseminated via the Town’s electronic News Flash and Atherton Online. There are approximately 1,200 subscribers to the Town’s electronic News Flash publications. Subscribers include residents as well as stakeholders – to include, but be not limited to, media outlets, school districts, Menlo Park Fire District, service provides (water, power, and sewer), and regional elected officials.

COMMISSION/COMMITTEE FEEDBACK/REFERRAL

This item ___ has or X has not been before a Town Committee or Commission.

- ___ Audit/Finance Committee (meets every other month)
- ___ Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee (meets as needed)
- ___ Civic Center Advisory Committee (meets as needed)
- ___ Environmental Programs Committee (meets every other month)
- ___ Park and Recreation Committee (meets each month)
- ___ Planning Commission (meets each month)
- ___ Rail Committee (meets every other month)
- ___ Transportation Committee (meets every other month)

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Notice of Intent

ATTACHMENT 1

TOWN OF ATHERTON
80 FAIR OAKS LANE
ATHERTON, CA 94027
TEL (650) 752-0570



February 18, 2022

Associate Administrator
Federal Railroad Administrator
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C., 20590

Subject: Notice of Intent – Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone Expansion

Dear Administrator:

The Town of Atherton is providing this Notice of Intent to inform you that an existing Quiet Zone is being expanded on track owned by Caltrain in the Town of Atherton, California. The purpose of this notice is to provide an opportunity for railroads and State agencies to provide comments and recommendations to the public authority as it is planning the Quiet Zone. You will have sixty (60) days from the date of this Notice to provide these comments.

The name of the existing Quiet Zone is the **Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone**. The Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone operates 24 hours a day and currently includes one crossing at Fair Oaks Lane (DOT #754986k). The following is a list of the public and private highway-rail grade crossings and pedestrian crossings proposed to be added to the Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone, within the Town of Atherton, California.

FRA Inventory DOT Number	Street or Highway	Road Authority	Railroad Authority	Public Private Pedestrian
754987S	Watkins Avenue	Town of Atherton	Caltrain	Public at-grade

Watkins Avenue is a 2-lane paved roadway with a posted maximum speed of 25 miles per hour. The Watkins Avenue crossing is a public at-grade crossing and is currently treated with approach gates with flashers, bells and cross bucks on each approach, and has constant warning time circuitry. The accompanying south sidewalk also has pedestrian scale railroad gates. A diagnostic review meeting was held on November 4, 2021. The proposed improvements include installation

ATTACHMENT 1

of railroad exit gates, to complete a 4-Quadrant Gate System installation. Advance warning signs advising motorists that train horns are not sounded at the crossing will be installed in accordance with §222.35(c) of the Amended Final Train Horn Rule. Upon completion, the highway-rail crossing will be compliant with the requirements for Supplementary Safety Measures as outlined in §222.35 of the Amended Final Train Horn Rule, August 17, 2006. The Town of Atherton will be responsible for maintaining the advance warning signs at the crossing.

The name and title of the person to act as point of contact and contact information is as follows:

Robert Ovadia, Director of Public Works
Town of Atherton
80 Fair Oaks Lane
Atherton, CA 94027
Phone: 650-752-0541
Email: rovadia@ci.atherton.ca.us

A list of the names and addresses of each party that has been sent a copy of this Notice of Intent is attached.

Sincerely,

George Rodericks
City Manager
Town of Atherton

Attachment: Notice of Intent Recipients

ATTACHMENT 1

LIST OF NOTICE OF INTENT RECIPIENTS

Atherton Fair Oaks Quiet Zone

Atherton, California

Karl Alexy
Associate Administrator
Railroad Safety & Chief Safety Officer
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C., 20590

Mr. Anton Garabetian, PE
Program Manager
Rail Crossings and Engineering Branch
California Public Utilities Commission
320 West 4th Street, Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90013

Board of Directors
Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board
1250 San Carlos Avenue
San Carlos, CA 94070-1306

Union Pacific Railroad
Engineering Department
Attn: Quiet Zone Establishment
1400 Douglas Street, STOP 0910
Omaha, NE 68179-0910

Kyle Gradinger
Railroad Crossing Safety Branch Chief
California Department of Transportation
Division of Rail
1120 N Street, Room 3400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Steven D. McCulley, Chief of Police
Atherton Police Department
80 Fair Oaks Lane
Atherton, CA 94027