

Date: September 3, 2024

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Eric Lopez, Director of Public Works   
Christopher Koontz, Director of Community Development 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Quiet Zone Feasibility**

---

On [July 16, 2024](#), City Council requested the City Manager to work with relevant departments to assess the feasibility of establishing a Quiet Zone on Union Pacific Railroad railway and to explore funding strategies. City of Long Beach (City) staff spoke with Union Pacific Railroad to learn more about the process for establishing a Quiet Zone and spoke with staff at the cities of Pomona and San Jose who have both gone through the process of setting up Quiet Zones. This memorandum outlines what is required to establish a Quiet Zone and the resources that would be needed to continue working on this project.

### **Overview of the Quiet Zone Process**

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulates rail operations across the country. Under the Train Horn Rule, locomotive engineers are required to sound train horns between 15 and 20 seconds ahead of all public grade crossings. The FRA allows localities to go through a process to establish a Quiet Zone, where locomotive horns would not be routinely sounded if certain technical requirements are met. Localities that want to designate a Quiet Zone are required to mitigate the increased risk caused by the absence of a horn by having crossing gates and flashing lights, advance warning signs, bells, and be compliant with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

There are two primary methods to establish a Quiet Zone: qualifying for automatic approval or applying to the FRA. Public authorities may designate a Quiet Zone without the need for a formal application and approval by the FRA, if the public crossings implement supplementary safety measures and the risk index is at or below the Nationwide Significant Risk Threshold or the Risk Index With Horns, as specified by the FRA. In this instance, the locality would need to issue required notices to stakeholders before implementing the Quiet Zone. Alternatively, if the public crossing does not meet the standard for an automatic approval, the public authority can apply to the FRA for approval. This would entail implementing alternative and supplemental safety measures to reduce the risk of the Quiet Zone, at cost to the locality.

In the case of the Quiet Zones proposed by the City Council action on July 16, 2024, the City would need to engage particular stakeholders in the establishment process, including the FRA, the California Public Utilities Commission which regulates at the state level, and

Union Pacific Railroad. The City would need to engage Union Pacific Railroad's engineering team to do a diagnostic assessment, which costs an estimated \$25,000 for each intersection. It takes about one month for them to complete their analysis. Once the assessment is complete, the City would need to engage with the property owner for any improvements to physical property. Oftentimes, it can be upwards of 18 months to get all the signal improvements and gate equipment installed before a Quiet Zone is officially approved.

The actual cost of infrastructure improvements needed at the intersections noted by City Council would have to be determined through this stakeholder outreach process, but in certain cases, establishing a Quiet Zone can cost millions of dollars for the initial infrastructure improvements and the localities are responsible for ongoing maintenance as well. Furthermore, in staff's conversations with Union Pacific Railroad and the cities of Pomona and San Jose, they reiterated that even when Quiet Zones are established, locomotive engineers are still required to sound train horns when people are on the tracks. Therefore, it is important to note that these investments would not completely eliminate the need for sounding train horns in all instances.

### **Next Steps**

In order to move forward with the Quiet Zone process, the City would need to allocate at least \$25,000 per intersection for Union Pacific Railroad to conduct a diagnostic assessment. For the two intersections mentioned in the Council action, that would be a minimum of \$50,000 to initiate the engineering evaluations by Union Pacific Railroad. Once the initial engineering assessments are completed, the City would have a better understanding of the scope of improvements needed at the intersections and the total costs associated with those improvements and ongoing maintenance costs, and would be able to return to City Council with additional details regarding fiscal impacts.

If you have any questions, please contact Tyler Bonanno-Curley, Deputy City Manager, at [tyler.curley@longbeach.gov](mailto:tyler.curley@longbeach.gov).

CC: DAWN MCINTOSH, CITY ATTORNEY  
DOUGLAS P. HAUBERT, CITY PROSECUTOR  
LAURA L. DOUD, CITY AUDITOR  
APRIL WALKER, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER  
MEREDITH REYNOLDS, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER  
GRACE YOON, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER  
TYLER BONANNO-CURLEY, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER  
KEVIN LEE, CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER  
MONIQUE DE LA GARZA, CITY CLERK (REF # [24-54159](#))  
DEPARTMENT HEADS