

# Questions and Answers about a Railroad Quiet Zone (RRQZ) in Eugene



## Q. What is a quiet zone?

A. A quiet zone is a section of rail line that contains one or more consecutive public crossings in which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded. A quiet zone must be at least ½ mile long. There must be no other crossings within a ¼ mile of the beginning or end of the quiet zone.

## Q. What safety measures are recommended for use in Eugene?

- A. Specific recommendations include:
- Quad gates – two gates increased to four gates at Monroe Street (with pedestrian gates), Madison Street, Washington Street, Pearl Street, High Street (with pedestrian gates), and Hilyard at 8<sup>th</sup>.
  - One-way street with gates at Jefferson
  - Closure of Lawrence Street crossing (dependent on approval of the design of a new Amtrak siding)
  - Medians at Lincoln Street (dependent on approval of the design of a new Amtrak siding)

- Quad gates or medians at Van Buren (depending parking impacts)
- Fencing – an additional measure to enhance safety of pedestrians and bicyclists and reduce trespass which triggers train horns

## Q. Who approves a quiet zone?

A. The Federal Rail Administration approves the City's application to create a quiet zone. The City must prove to federal and state regulatory agencies that safety measures are in place that are sufficient to reduce the risk index within the quiet zone to at or below the Nationwide Significant Risk Threshold.

## Q. Why do trains blow their horns as they travel through Eugene?

A. Except in designated quiet zones, for safety reasons a train engineer is required to sound the train horn with two long, one short, two long blasts, starting 15 to 20 seconds before the train enters an at-grade crossing. Approximately ¼ mile prior to the crossing; the horn is repeated or prolonged until the locomotive occupies the crossing. The horns must be a minimum 96 dB to a maximum 110 dB, measured 100 feet in front of the train.

**Q. Will train engineers sound their horns, even in a quiet zone?**

**A.** Train engineers use the horn for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, they sound the horn in the event of an emergency – for example, if a pedestrian or bicyclist is on the tracks or within the right-of-way. UP has a switching yard about 2000 feet north of Van Buren, and trains give a short toot as they enter and leave the yard. Trains also sound their horn with one short blast when entering and leaving the Eugene Depot. The short toots are 1 to 2 seconds, compared to a through train that sounds its horn for a total of 105 seconds as it passes through the six middle crossings on the UP mainline.

**Q. Why were the 10 crossings in downtown and Whiteaker selected for a quiet zone?**

**A.** Ten crossings on the Union Pacific Rail Road between Hilyard Street and Van Buren Street generate about 70% of the routine train horn soundings for public crossings in Eugene. Based on the concentration of crossings and the potential for reduced horn sounding, the Eugene City Council agreed to focus initial quiet zone efforts on these 10 crossings. Three UP mainline at-grade crossings north of Van Buren Street – Irving Road, Irvington Road, and Awbrey Lane – generate about 20% of the train horn sounding in the Eugene area. These three crossings are under the jurisdiction of Lane County.



**Q. How long does it take to get a quiet zone in place?**

**A.** The Railroad Quiet Zone project has several phases:

- The preliminary engineering phase began in March 2015 when the Eugene City Council directed staff to pursue a quiet zone that would meet federal requirements. Preliminary engineering is expected to be complete in late 2016.
- Community engagement began in November 2015 with the formation of a Citizen Advisory Panel. Following broad outreach in spring 2016, the panel is expected to present its final recommendations to the City Council in June 2016. The time frame for resolving the question of project funding, particularly if it involves voter approval, is not known at this time. The earliest date would probably be July

2017, if the funding were included in the City's Fiscal Year 2018 budget.

- Once council approval and funding are in place, it will take up to three years to complete final engineering, procurement of safety equipment and installation of the equipment and related construction work. Some of the design and construction can start earlier at specific locations if funds are available.

**Q. How much will it cost to implement the recommended safety measures?**

**A.** Based on the recommendations of the RRQZ Citizen Advisory Panel, total estimated cost of the preliminary recommended safety measures ranges between \$6,835,000 and \$7,350,000.

**Q. Where will the money come from?**

- A.** There are three general options for funding a railroad quiet zone:
- Approve a new revenue source, such as a general obligation bond voted on by citizens of Eugene.
  - Use existing revenues such as local gas taxes and the City's general fund. However, this would likely require reducing some local services such as street repairs and maintaining city buildings and parks
  - Combine new and existing revenue sources. For example, if the Riverfront Urban Renewal District paid about \$3.1 million for the crossings and Hilyard, High and Pearl, a \$4.3 million general obligation bond could cost less than \$15 a year for five years for the owner of a \$190,000 home.

**Q. How can I get more information?**

**A.** Information can be found at [www.eugene-or.gov/quietzone](http://www.eugene-or.gov/quietzone). This web site Includes detailed reports, notices of upcoming meetings and presentations, and an online survey and comment form. You can also contact Eric Jones, Special Projects Manager, at 541-682-5053 or email [eric.r.jones@ci.eugene.or.us](mailto:eric.r.jones@ci.eugene.or.us).

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