

AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA



Thursday, January 25, 2007

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Public Works RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL ACTION

ITEM No 17

Subject Approve an ordinance to establish a Quiet Zone eliminating the need to sound train horns or other warning devices at the Union Pacific Railroad crossing at Dittmar Road

Additional Backup Material

(click to open)

No Attachments Available

For More Information Richard Kroger, 974-7219, Laura Bohl, 974-7064

On June 24, 2005, a Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Rule was passed giving governmental jurisdictions the ability to create 'quiet zones' to restrict locomotives from routinely sounding their horn, as is otherwise required by law, when approaching an at-grade railway-roadway intersection. This requires that supplemental safety measures be provided at the crossing. A crossing can be made quiet-zone compliant by one of three means: installation of four railroad crossing gates that block the entire roadway in both directions, construction of a continuous raised center median for at least 100 feet on each side of the railroad to prevent drivers from going around existing gates, or installation of wayside horns at the intersection. In the case of a power outage or other malfunction, train engineers must sound their horn. Each option also requires that the constant warning system be upgraded as necessary to ensure train engineers are warned of any power outage or other malfunction.

Improvements required by Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) at Dittmar Road were completed in March 2006. These improvements included all necessary upgrades to the warning system. The roadway project also included a raised center median which required minor modifications to make this location fully quiet-zone compliant. Notices to UPRR and the Texas Department of Transportation required by the FRA rule in order to institute a quiet zone at this location have been submitted. The notices require a 60-day comment period, which expired on January 5, 2007. No comments have been received that would prevent a quiet zone from being established at this location.

The law currently requires sounding of a horn when a train is within 1/4 mile of the crossing. This requested City Council action will restrict routine sounding of train horns as a warning as trains approach Dittmar Road, Rail Crossing ID #447638L. It does not apply to other train noise such as squeaking brakes, the noise of the wheels on rails, or engine noise. Also, engineers will continue to sound the horn at their discretion, for example, when people are walking near the track, even within the quiet zone. Other public roadway intersections with UPRR will be brought forward to City Council in the future. From south to north, the rail intersects the following other public roadways: Dittmar Road, Matthews Lane, Stassney Lane, Bannister Lane, Oltorf Street, Mary Street and Duval Road. UPRR is currently preparing preliminary estimates for wayside horns to be provided at each location. No schedule for installing the horns at these other locations is currently available from UPRR. After estimates are received, staff will prepare a summary of options for the remaining crossings with available funding, and request City Council action to enter into an agreement with UPRR to perform design of the approved option for each location. Upon completion of design, another agreement with UPRR will be necessary to implement the approved option to institute quiet zones at the other locations.