

Memorandum



City Manager's Office

DATE: April 13, 2010
TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: Jeff Kulaga, Assistant City Manager (350-8844)
SUBJECT: Issue Review Session 5/6/10: Union Pacific Railroad Noise Mitigation Update

At the Council Issue Review Session (IRS) on May 6, staff will present an update regarding noise mitigation measures for the Union Pacific Railroad, including the status of implementing a Quiet Zone in North/Central Tempe.

Background

Per the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), the Federal Railroad Administration published the Final Rule on the Use of Locomotive Horns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings in 2005 by establishing the standard use of train horns at crossings. The rule requires the locomotive horn to be sounded at all public grade crossings for 15 to 20 seconds in length for no more than a quarter mile prior to each crossing. The pattern for blowing the horn is two long, one short, and one long sounding to be repeated as necessary until the locomotive clears the crossing.

Current Situation in North/Central Tempe

Over the last four years, the city has been working with Union Pacific to address concerns from neighbors living adjacent to the railroad regarding train noise. In an effort to address these concerns, the city is pursuing the establishment of a permanent Quiet Zone north of Broadway Road from city limit to city limit. A Quiet Zone is a rail corridor at least one half mile in length containing one or more public highway-rail grade crossings within which activation of train horns is prohibited, except in certain situations. The majority of the exceptions are related to safety concerns. The process for establishing a Quiet Zone includes approvals from the Arizona Department of Transportation, Union Pacific Railroad, Arizona Corporation Commission and Federal Railroad Administration. The process also includes design of the Quiet Zone, construction of a signal box at 13th Street and notification to residents of its establishment. Staff estimates that the Quiet Zone should be operational in November.

Current Situation in Central/South Tempe

Recently, neighbors in the Kyrene/Elliott area have expressed concern regarding the train noise during the nighttime hours. Staff met with representatives from Union Pacific to discuss noise issues along this portion the railroad in Tempe. As a result of the economic downturn, train schedules for Union Pacific have shifted from daytime hours to the nighttime. Horns are consistently activated (per CFR regulations) between Guadalupe and Elliot roads. The reason for this mile and a half stretch of activated horn noise is due to the crossings at SPR and MEGlobal, which are located between Guadalupe and Elliot roads. Staff recommend soliciting Requests for Proposals (RFP) to hire a consultant to conduct a study of the area in Central/South Tempe to determine if a Quiet Zone is

feasible and to identify the costs associated to make the improvements. This study, estimated to cost approximately \$150,000, would include the feasibility of establishing a Quiet Zone at the intersection of Elliot and Kyrene roads, which is an area of logistical concern to staff.

Public Involvement

In cooperation with Union Pacific, the city is communicating with its residents the status of the Quiet Zone in North/Central Tempe and the current train schedules in Central/South Tempe. Staff and Union Pacific are committed to working together to notify residents of any construction along the railroad or schedule changes that may impact the neighborhoods.