

Common Myths about Quiet Zones

❖ Our community already has a whistle ban, so no action is required

Fact: The new Federal Law supersedes local whistle bans. To allow for communities to come into compliance, the FRA has established a "Pre-Rule Quiet Zone." To be considered for pre-rule status, your community **MUST**:

- Have an average risk at all crossings less than the National Significant Risk Threshold (NSRT) OR below twice the NSRT with no relevant collisions within the past 5 years.
- Have a 24-hour whistle ban in place on October 9, 1996 and December 18, 2003. Temporary whistle bans (such as nighttime) are not eligible.
- Have a plan in place within 3 years to bring all crossings into compliance and all construction work must be done within 5 years.

❖ Funding is available to help communities create Quiet Zones

Fact: Most railroads do not participate in the costs of any grade crossings, as railroads view crossings as a roadway issue. The FRA does not mandate how crossing improvements can be funded, although the State of Minnesota ruled that Section 130 safety funds are NOT eligible for Quiet Zones. This is based on the fact that crossing improvements are only meant to offset the safety benefits of locomotive horns.

❖ All crossings in a community have to be part of the Quiet Zone

Fact: The FRA has ruled that the minimum length of a Quiet Zone must be ½-mile measured on a corridor basis. The FRA does not use municipal boundaries as limits for Quiet Zones, so it is advantageous for urban and suburban communities to coordinate with adjacent cities. In recent rulings, the FRA concluded that in cases with parallel rail lines through one community, both must be included in the Quiet Zone to meet driver's expectations. If isolated crossings are more than ½-mile away, but within the same community, those crossings do not require inclusion into the Quiet Zone.

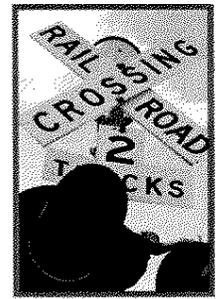
❖ Passive Warning Devices are acceptable if the risk is low

Fact: Passive Warning Devices (such as Crossbucks / STOP sign) are not considered acceptable within a Quiet Zone. The minimum level of warning device includes flashing red lights with an automatic gate arm. The only exception is pre-rule Quiet Zones where the community plans to replace these passive Warning Devices with flashing red lights and a gate arm within the next 5 years.

❖ This rule does not apply to slow moving trains or those switching cars

Fact: Train speed is an element of the risk calculations; however, the rule will be applied to all public crossing irrespective of train speed. This includes cases where the same train may pass over the same crossing multiple times for switching operations. The rule also applies public grade crossings of any tracks, whether the track carries one-hundred trains per day or just one train per year.

Summary of the Federal Railroad Administration Interim Final Rule on Use of Locomotive Horns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings



Q: What is a "Quiet Zone?"

A: New Federal law (49 USC 20153) will require all trains to sound the locomotive horn 20 seconds prior to arrival at all public grade crossings beginning on December 18, 2004. This law will most significantly affect communities with whistle bans that prohibit the sounding of horns, especially during nighttime hours. As a means to silence locomotive horns, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) allows for communities to conduct an engineering study to determine if public crossings can operate safely without locomotive horns. The study is then reviewed by the FRA and if approved, the corridor created is called a "Quiet Zone."

Q: How are Quiet Zones created?

A: Quiet Zones are risk based, as are many decisions regarding infrastructure. Based upon years of research, the FRA concluded the sounding of locomotive horns increases crossing safety by approximately 38%. By silencing the horns, specific counter measures must be taken to offset the safety benefits of locomotive horns (and reduce the risk of a vehicle-train collision). Communities must calculate how each crossing compares to the FRA-calculated National Significant Risk Threshold (NSRT), as this is a benchmark minimum level of risk acceptance for all crossings. Crossings with higher risk than the NSRT can be improved using safety measures.

Q: What needs to be installed to create a Quiet Zone?

A: The minimum level of warning device acceptable is flashing lights and automatics gates. If the calculated risk is still too high, the FRA has two categories of crossing enhancements: (1) Supplemental Safety Measures and (2) Alternative Safety Measures. Supplemental Safety Measures (SSM's) are FRA-approved crossing safety treatments, namely:

- ❖ Temporary closure (such as nighttime)
- ❖ Four-quadrant gate systems
- ❖ Gates with medians or channelization (most common for communities)
- ❖ Conversion to one-way street

The effectiveness of these measures at any particular crossing is calculated through an engineering study. Alternative Safety Measures (ASM's) represent any non-FRA approved crossing treatment or non-engineering treatments (such as photo-enforcement). If ASM's are proposed, the community requesting the Quiet Zone has the burden of proof to demonstrate the effectiveness of each measure.

Q: How are Quiet Zones approved?

A: An engineering study must be completed to determine the risk and appropriate mitigation measures. This report is submitted to the FRA who has the sole authority to approve the application. FRA may also revoke the Quiet Zone for safety reasons if crash problems persist.