



## Request for City Council Committee Action From the Department of Public Works

**Date:** September 14, 2004  
**To:** Honorable Sandra Colvin Roy, Chair Transportation & Public Works Committee  
**Referral to:** None

**Subject:** Railroad Quiet Zones

**Recommendation:** Receive and file

**Previous Directives:** None

**Prepared by:** John R. Hotvet, P.E., Traffic Operations Engineer, 673-2743

**Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Klara A. Fabry, P.E., City Engineer, Director of Public Works

**Presenters:** John Hotvet

### **Financial Impact** (Check those that apply)

- No financial impact - or - Action is within current department budget.  
(If checked, go directly to Background/Supporting Information)
- Action requires an appropriation increase to the Capital Budget
- Action requires an appropriation increase to the Operating Budget
- Action provides increased revenue for appropriation increase
- Action requires use of contingency or reserves
- Other financial impact (Explain):
- Request provided to the Budget Office when provided to the Committee Coordinator

### **Background/Supporting Information**

New Federal law (49 USC 20153) will require all trains under the jurisdiction of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to sound the locomotive horns 20 seconds prior to arrival at all public grade crossings beginning on December 18, 2004. This law will affect communities such as Minneapolis with whistle bans that prohibit the sounding of horns, especially during nighttime hours. As a means to silence locomotive horns the 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". Further information can be found in Attachment A to this letter.

Public Works has contracted with a consultant to prepare an engineering study on the locomotive horn issue. They will be reviewing all the railroad-street grade crossings in

Minneapolis (approximately 89 locations), doing a comprehensive risk-based assessment and engineering study, preparing a formal submittal to the FRA, and providing support for potential corridors that may no longer be eligible for Quiet Zone status.

In the long term the pre-rule status for Quiet Zones will expire no later than December 18, 2009. That means that locomotive horns will sound at grade crossings unless the crossings have been upgraded with flashing lights, automatic gates, and some alternative safety measures, such as medians on the approaches or four quadrant gates. Constructed improvements must be completed by December 18, 2009, and the planned improvements must be submitted to the FRA for approval by December 18, 2007.

A detailed cost estimate for upgrading all the grade crossings cannot be developed until a detailed analysis of each grade crossing is completed. Permanent improvements could range from approximately \$200,000 to install a four-quadrant gate system at a crossing or something less if other mitigation method can be used. An initial city-wide cost estimate averaging \$50,000 for each grade crossing results in an overall total cost about \$4.5 million to be completed by December 18, 2009. These funds cannot come from safety funding sources or the railroads unless a determination has been made that there is an existing safety issue.

It is our intention to return to the City Council in mid-October with the results of the engineering study.

Attachment A

Cc: Mayor, Council Members, Fred Abadi, Rhonda Rae, Don Elwood