

# Quiet Zones

## Federal Rule Could Lead to More Tranquil Neighborhoods

Local governments, trying to protect the integrity of their neighborhoods, are examining a variety of ways they can make railroad crossings less noisy. A new federal rule is paving the way to what officials hope will be quieter times. The Federal Railroad Administration has issued a final rule on the use of locomotive horns at highway-rail crossings that became effective June 24, 2005. The regulation requires trains to blow their horns within a quarter-mile of a crossing unless a quiet zone has been established. The intent of quiet zones is to reduce noise in neighborhoods while maintaining the highest level of safety. So if a city decides trains must remain silent through some or all of its crossings, safeguards must be in

place to prevent accidents involving pedestrians or drivers.

The quiet-zone rule is intended to promote safety, help neighborhoods requesting relief from loud train whistles, and respect the bans that have been enacted by communities before the federal rule took effect. In the environmental impact statement, the federal government estimated the whistle ban would affect more than 150,000 crossings. Local governments have several choices of how to give residents a more tranquil environment. If they prove implementation will cause no serious harm, additional safety measures are not required. However, many times, the silencing of a whistle will have to be accompanied by one or more devices. The following are

options: Use of a four-quadrant gate, which makes it difficult for cars to pass through; closing a street at a rail crossing; or installing medians. Wayside horns, which are placed at the crossing, can also serve to minimize noise. Noise emanates from them at the same decibel level as train whistles but theoretically are less bothersome to area residents and businesses because they remain in one place.

In April 2005, Irving became the region's first city to implement the quiet-zone concept along a 1.5-mile stretch of Trinity Railway Express track. The zone includes four crossings and uses the four-quadrant gates at each.

Jim O'Connor, Irving transportation manager, said

city officials did not want to alter the streets by adding medians, another quiet-zone option.

The project, included new pavement and other infrastructure improvements. The system also has a flashing warning light for oncoming trains and sensors under the street to detect traffic at the intersections.

"It's a very involved, very complex system," O'Connor said.

NCTCOG is leading efforts in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, having hosted a technical workshop this spring so municipalities could learn more about how to establish quiet zones.

