UNION PACIFIC

Quiet Zones

BUILDING AMERICA®

WHY DO RAILROADS USE TRAIN HORNS?

The horn is a critical safety measure, alerting drivers and pedestrians to a train's approach. Under federal rules, a train horn must be sounded at least 15 seconds before the train reaches a public crossing.

WHAT IS A QUIET ZONE?

A quiet zone is an area designated by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) where train horns are not required to be routinely sounded. Quiet zones are approved by the FRA after safety enhancements are made at the crossings to mitigate increased risks associated with the absence of a train horn.

It is important to understand that even after a Quiet Zone is established, a train horn can still be sounded at the discretion of the locomotive engineer to alert nearby drivers, pedestrians, trespassers or other trains.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ESTABLISHING A QUIET ZONE?

Only government agencies with authority over the roads at the crossings may establish quiet zones, including cities or counties. They are also responsible for the financial investments needed to make any safety enhancements required to mitigate the increased risk of not sounding a train horn.

WHO CAN APPROVE A QUIET ZONE?

While railroads play an important role in the Quiet Zone process, only the FRA can approve a Quiet Zone after required safety enhancements are made by the public agency.

HOW MUCH DOES A QUIET ZONE COST?

Public agencies seeking to establish Quiet Zones are responsible for all associated costs. The costs of installing safety systems and infrastructure modifications to meet Quiet Zone requirements can range from $30,000 per crossing to more than $1 million, depending on the number of crossings and types of safety improvements required. This includes the cost of the engineering and design, materials, construction and maintenance costs.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR A QUIET ZONE TO BE IMPLEMENTED?

The Quiet Zone process is not dependent on a single entity, but involves coordination among local, state and federal agencies, as well as railroads. For any Quiet Zone project to be completed safely and in compliance with FRA standards, it can take several years and is dependent on the project's size and complexity.

KEY STEPS TO CREATE A QUIET ZONE

Notifications: Public agencies that have decided to explore and/or pursue a Quiet Zone project should notify all key stakeholders, including the FRA, the railroad and, depending on individual states, public utility commissions. Union Pacific has an online portal that makes it easier for cities, counties and others to submit public project proposals.

Diagnostic review of the crossing: The public agency, the railroad and the FRA must conduct a review of the crossing to determine what safety measures need to be taken and whether the crossing or crossings qualify for a Quiet Zone designation.

Preliminary Engineering Agreement: The public agency and Union Pacific work together on a preliminary engineering agreement, allowing the railroad's engineering teams to review the initial design plans for the proposed crossing or crossings.

Notice of Intent: Public agencies must give notice of intent to create a Quiet Zone via written notification to all key stakeholders, including the railroads, the state and other key parties. The Notice of Intent gives impacted stakeholders 60 days to comment on the Quiet Zone, including the safety measures proposed by the public agency.

FRA Submittal: Public agencies must submit a detailed plan for establishing a Quiet Zone, which will include a timetable for the implementation of safety improvements. Details of the Quiet Zone process can be found on the FRA's website. The FRA can approve, reject or request additional safety measures or design changes.

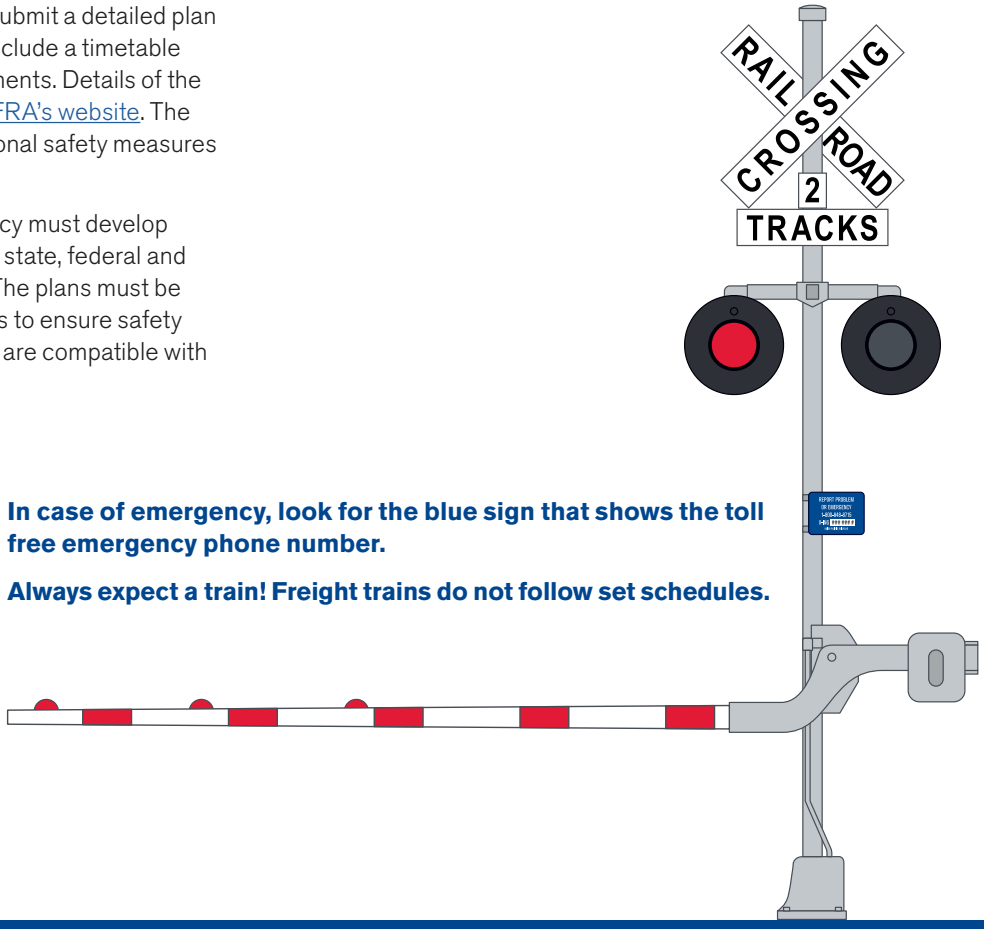
Engineering Designs: The public agency must develop engineering plans to meet FRA, railroads, state, federal and uniform traffic control design standards. The plans must be reviewed and approved by all stakeholders to ensure safety requirements are met and enhancements are compatible with the crossing(s).

Agreements: The public authority and the railroad must negotiate a contract that outlines the construction work to be done, and the associated costs, along with annual maintenance expenses.

Construction: Union Pacific will complete railroad construction, which includes any rail, crossing surface, or warning system installation that is owned and maintained by the railroad. All civil construction work, including but not limited to roadway and sidewalk construction, traffic signals, pavement markings, etc., will be completed by the public agency.

Final Notification: Public utilities must notify all stakeholders when the work is done. This gives key stakeholders time to inspect the safety improvements prior to the implementation of the Quiet Zone.

For additional information:
www.up.com/communities/public-projects/horn-quiet-zone



In case of emergency, look for the blue sign that shows the toll free emergency phone number.

Always expect a train! Freight trains do not follow set schedules.