



CITY OF
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ALTO**

Planning & Transportation Commission Staff Report

From: Jonathan Lait, Planning and Development Services Director
Lead Department: Planning and Development Services

Meeting Date: April 26, 2023
Report #: 2303-1201

TITLE

Study Session to Review Quiet Zone Study and Conceptual Plan for Caltrain Corridor at Palo Alto Avenue

RECOMMENDATION

Hold a study session to review Quiet Zone study at Palo Alto Avenue and provide feedback on the conceptual plan prepared for the implementation of the quiet zone at this crossing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Transportation is currently working on the Quiet Zone (QZ) study at Palo Alto Avenue in collaboration with City of Menlo Park. Based on the study, the project consultant has prepared the conceptual plans for improvements that will be necessary to implement the quiet zone at this crossing. Staff is seeking feedback from the Planning and Transportation Commission for consideration and recommendation to the Rail Committee and the City Council.

BACKGROUND

The City of Palo Alto (City) has received several requests for consideration of Quiet Zone at crossings across Caltrain Corridor. As the first phase of this project, the City of Menlo Park, in coordination with the City of Palo Alto, is conducting a QZ study that includes consideration of a quiet zone at the Palo Alto Avenue/Alma Street crossing. Kimley Horn and Associates was selected as consultant to perform this study. The procurement process was led by the City of Menlo Park consistent with its policies and practices. A similar study at other crossings within Palo Alto will be performed as a second phase of this project.

DISCUSSION

Federal regulation requires that locomotive horns begin sounding 15–20 seconds before entering public rail grade crossings, no more than one-quarter mile in advance. However, local agencies can implement Quiet Zones where railroads have been directed to cease the routine of sounding their horns when approaching public highway-rail grade crossings. Train horns may still be used in emergency situations or to comply with other Federal regulations or railroad operating rules.

The FRA Title 49 regulations provide opportunity for localities nationwide to mitigate the effects of train horn noise by establishing Quiet Zones. The regulations require a quiet zone study to review the Quiet Zone Risk Index (QZRI) qualifying for quiet zone or Supplemental Safety Measures (SSM) at each crossing. Based on the study, the crossings need to be upgraded to be safer without horns than they are in the current state with horns before proceeding with quiet zones.

The City of Palo Alto in collaboration with City of Menlo Park, procured the services of the Consultant, Kimley Horn and Associates to perform the Quiet Zone study. The Consultant performed the study in accordance with FRA regulations and developed conceptual plans recommending measures consistent with FRA and CPUC requirements.

The improvements primarily recommended are modifications to median islands on Palo Alto Avenue on both sides of the railroad tracks. These improvements include the reconstruction of a median island with eight (8) inch curb and extension of the median island and associated signage/markings to meet regulatory standards. A field diagnostic meeting was held amongst a team of consultant staff, staff from the cities of Palo Alto and Menlo Park, California Public Utilities Commission, Caltrain, and Federal Railway Administration. The purpose was to review the existing conditions and review the proposed measures in developing recommendations to implement the Quiet Zone. Attachment A provides the draft conceptual plans showing the recommended improvements.

Staff seeks Planning and Transportation Commission review and recommendations for implementing a quiet zone at Palo Alto Avenue in this study session.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed modifications are minor upgrades to an existing street right-of-way and would not result in any new significant impacts on the environment. This project is considered to be a minor alteration to the existing street system, and therefore categorically exempt (Class 1 Exemption, Section 15301) from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Planning and Transportation Commission meetings are open to the public and therefore provide the community with opportunities to provide comments to the Committee and the City. In addition, an outreach meeting was conducted on March 23, 2023, to share the findings of the study and to seek feedback from the community.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft Conceptual Plan

AUTHOR/TITLE:

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