



Bringing quiet to FasTracks, Northwest Rail project

RTD says it will help towns quell horns at crossings

By John Aguilar
Wednesday, March 12, 2008

LOUISVILLE -- A FasTracks official said Tuesday that RTD has enough money to help make the necessary safety upgrades to rail crossings on the Northwest Rail line, which will allow many cities and towns in the corridor to successfully apply for Quiet Zone status.

The federally approved Quiet Zone designation would eliminate the requirement that trains passing over a street or highway blast their horns multiple times.

The issue of noise associated with a sharp increase in expected rail activity along the corridor has become a major issue for many residents, because dozens of commuter trains are slated to ride FasTrack's 41-mile rail line between Denver and Longmont every day starting in 2014 or 2015.

"We have good reason to believe we will be successful with these applications," Karen Morales, a member of the FasTracks Public Involvement Team, said at a 36 Commuting Solutions steering committee meeting Tuesday morning in Louisville.

With \$15 million budgeted for noise mitigation and an additional \$300,000 available for safety improvements at each of the corridor's 40 or so at-grade crossings, Morales said RTD can help municipalities put in place the safety improvements required for the Federal Railroad Administration to waive its horn-blowing directive.

She said her agency will work with the FRA and local agencies this summer to test each at-grade crossing for noise levels and determine the cost of equipping them with the necessary safety features, like gates, lights and signs.

Then the agency will dip into its funds to help pay for the improvements and set up local governments to apply for a Quiet Zone, she said.

But Joanna Zimmelman, a Lafayette resident who lives near the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad tracks on which the Northwest Rail commuter trains will run, said she is concerned that her city and others along the corridor could get stuck with a larger bill than their elected leaders are willing to pay.

She fears that with only a short segment of track inside Lafayette -- which will have no station and receive no urban redevelopment funds to help it with the costs of preparing for commuter rail -- the crossing at 95th Street and Baseline Road may not get the consideration and funding necessary to qualify as a Quiet Zone.

"It's an arduous process," Zimmelman said of the application process. "We need the support of City Council for anything to happen."

Chris Quinn, RTD's planning program manager for the Northwest Rail line, said cities and towns in the corridor might consider a strength-in-numbers approach to the issue.

He said there is talk among the municipalities along the route of making a joint request of the FRA to turn the entire corridor into one large Quiet Zone.



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.