

Staff Report

AMES QUIET ZONE STATUS

November 23, 2010

26

In 2005 the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a final ruling on establishing Quiet Zones for at-grade railroad crossings. This allowed cities to designate a corridor of track within their community and to prohibit the routine sounding of train horns after the city has installed appropriate safety measures.

In April of 2006, the City of Ames initiated this process by initiating a community-wide survey, which consisted of a mailed survey to those who live along the tracks on both rail lines through town, a web survey, and a downtown business owner survey. The purpose was to determine if Ames residents felt pursuing a Quiet Zone was important for our community. The survey yielded support for the process to move forward along the east-west mainline instead of the north-south agricultural line.

In the months up through the end of 2006, staff worked with Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and FRA representatives to identify what safety improvements were needed at the six mainline crossings at North Dakota Avenue, Scholl Avenue, Hazel Avenue, Clark Avenue, Kellogg Avenue, and Duff Avenue. Once compiled, that information was presented to the City Council in December 2006, outlining various levels of safety improvements needed and their respective costs.

The City Council opted to go with an investment in crossing safety that was well above the minimum required to establish the Quiet Zone. This not only afforded the community a higher safety score, it made significant safety improvements to each of the crossings.

After City Council approval, staff submitted our Notice of Intent (NOI) to the FRA to establish the Quiet Zone. This NOI is the official step for Washington members of FRA to review and comment on the Ames application. The process of review concluded with an official approval on April 7, 2010, stating that Ames does qualify for a Quiet Zone. Immediately following the approval, staff began work to install the designated safety measures. The concrete median project was completed and inspected by the UPRR and FRA on November 9, 2010.

On November 15, 2010, staff submitted the Notice of Establishment to the FRA designating December 6, 2010 as the date the Quiet Zone will take effect. This notification was sent to the UPRR, and gave them 21 days to notify their engineers of the date on which they are to cease the routine sounding of horns. It should be noted that the train engineers can sound their horns after the Quiet Zone is in place, but only for emergency reasons.

Following December 6, 2010, if a citizen of Ames observes a violation of the Quiet Zone, they can take the following steps to report the incident. They should report the date, time, and location that they witnessed the train blowing its horns. This report should be sent to the City's Public Works Department for staff, who will process the complaint with the FRA to resolve the issue.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, this has been a very lengthy process. However, the work has resulted in what will now be a significant improvement to the quality of life for many citizens in Ames. The change is not only in the reduction of noise levels that the public experiences on a daily basis, but more importantly is in the addition of safety measures at these mainline crossings.