STAFF REPORT

DATE: October 4, 2016

TO: City Council

FROM: Cathy Capriola, Interim City Manager
      Russ Thompson, Public Works Director

PRESENTER: Cathy Capriola, Interim City Manager
           Russ Thompson, Public Works Director

SUBJECT: UPDATE AND COUNCIL DIRECTION ON QUIET ZONES INCLUDING THE CITY’S REQUEST TO THE CITY OF SAN RAFAEL TO CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE QUIET ZONE FOR MARIN, TAKING NEXT STEPS BASED ON SAN RAFAEL’S RESPONSE AND OTHER INFORMATION, AND REQUEST FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF AD-HOC COUNCIL SUB-COMMITTEE TO WORK WITH STAFF ON VARIETY OF SMART ISSUES.

REQUEST

Consider receiving an update and providing direction to staff on Quiet Zones including the City’s request to the City of San Rafael to create a comprehensive Quiet Zone for Marin, taking next steps based on San Rafael's response and other information, and request for establishment of ad-hoc Council Sub-Committee to work with staff on variety of SMART issues.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Hear an update regarding the City of San Rafael’s discussion at their October 3rd Council Meeting regarding Novato’s request to create a comprehensive Quiet Zone for Novato, Marin County and San Rafael.

2. If moving forward, direct staff to continue to work cooperatively with SMART, San Rafael, and Marin County to create a combined Quiet Zone application for crossings in Novato, Marin County, and San Rafael creating a consistent and comprehensive Quiet Zone.

3. Authorize the Interim City Manager to submit a formal letter rescinding Novato’s current Notice of Intent and expressing support for the City of San Rafael to serve as the lead agency for the creation of a comprehensive Quiet Zone.

4. Authorize Novato to cover consultant costs required to resubmit a revised comprehensive Quiet Zone for Marin estimated to be less than $15,000.

5. Create a Council sub-committee to work with staff on Quiet Zones and other issues related to the coming of the SMART train including indemnification and maintenance agreement with SMART, agreements with Marin County and San Rafael, and commuter benefits and other ways to encourage our employees to use SMART.
BACKGROUND

On March 24, 2015, the City Council, after significant public testimony, directed staff to implement a Quiet Zone (QZ) in Novato after completion of SMART’s safety testing, but prior to the beginning of regular passenger service (both currently estimated by SMART to occur in December 2016). At that time, the City was told by Federal Railroad Administration representatives and industry professionals that the process to implement Quiet Zones was between 4-6 months.

In 2015 and 2016, SMART installed physical safety improvements at crossings throughout Sonoma and Marin in order to make the system "Quiet Zone ready” should any community choose to implement Quiet Zones. The Federal Railroad Administration, the federal agency that governs rail safety, has determined that the implementation of Quiet Zones, with the addition of supplemental safety measures of physical improvements at the crossings (gates, medians, etc.) provides an equivalent or higher level of safety as would exist with standard crossing improvements in combination with the sounding of train horns.

In early 2016, the City hired a consultant to prepare one Quiet Zone application for all of Novato. As part of the Quiet Zone process, a diagnostic review (an inspection and testing of all crossing improvements) has to occur by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). In late April 2016, the City met with the FRA, CPUC, SMART and other agencies to inspect and review the improvements at each crossing. At this meeting, the City was told that:

1. Novato would need two Quiet Zones -- one for the SMART 101 corridor, and one for the freight-only/Highway 37 corridor, and

2. The southern ending point of the Quiet Zone along 101 could not end at the Hamilton State Access Pedestrian Crossing. Staff was told that the Quiet Zone could also not end at the Hamilton Station or Main Gate Road. Federal policy requires a quiet zone to begin and end only at a public road and railroad track surface crossing. This means that pedestrian crossings, train stations, private roads, and overpasses (such as Main Gate Road) do not qualify as the beginning or ending of a Quiet Zone. Based on this determination, there would be no Quiet Zone at the Hamilton State Access Road Pedestrian Crossing, unless another solution could be found.

Based on this direction from the FRA, the City submitted a Notice of Intent (NOI) for the SMART corridor between Rush Creek Place and Hamilton Parkway on June 5, 2016. The comment period for the City’s NOI closed on August 5, 2016, receiving only comments from SMART and the California Public Utility Commission (CPUC). During this time, staff began exploring options to see how the area south of Hamilton Parkway could be included within the Quiet Zone. Since that time staff has been exploring options for the area south of Hamilton Parkway, including meetings with SMART, City of San Rafael, Congressman Huffman’s Office, and representatives from both the FRA and the CPUC. There were many options explored that were envisioned as potentially more straightforward (waivers, etc.); however, there was no success. In addition, back-up alternatives were also researched for the Hamilton State Access Pedestrian Crossing.
On June 14, 2016, the City Council received the updated presentation of the Quiet Zone status, including obstacles to silencing train horns between Hamilton Parkway and the Novato South - Hamilton Station. Staff reviewed options which included:

- A. Retain the Pedestrian Crossing and Install “Wayside Horns”, or
- B. Retain the Pedestrian Crossing and No Southerly Quiet Zone, or
- C. Remove the Pedestrian Crossing

Council directed staff to facilitate a community workshop on the options for the pedestrian crossing to ensure the public had the opportunity to ask questions, and express their concerns. A community workshop was held on August 24, 2016. Approximately 80 residents attended. Staff presented the following presentation, answered questions and took suggestions. The majority of those present, expressed significant concern about the horn noise. There were also residents present that wanted to see the crossing maintained as it is used as a walking path and neighborhood connector. The absence of this pedestrian crossing means a longer path for students to reach the Charter School, and public access to the Hamilton wetlands and other neighborhood amenities including a library.

At the end of the meeting, the majority of those still present selected the removal of the pedestrian crossing in order to avoid the noise of the horns and crossing bells, and ultimately an adverse impact to the residents' quality of life. Staff committed to sending out a survey to gain broad neighborhood input to be shared with the Council. Staff also committed to doing an updated count of the number of users of the crossing.

A community survey and background materials was posted on September 29 regarding the options above. Residents will have until noon on October 11 to provide their input. The City Council will consider back-up alternatives for the pedestrian crossing at their October 11th Council meeting.

DISCUSSION

There are two potential options being explored now regarding Quiet Zones in Novato.

**Option #1 – Create a Comprehensive Quiet Zone with Novato, San Rafael and Marin** which would add the Hamilton State Access Pedestrian Crossing to the new Quiet Zone and eliminate horn noise while retaining the pedestrian crossing and access.

It was not until further guidance and commitments were received from the FRA and CPUC in mid-September, (largely in response to the efforts of SMART, FRA staff in Sacramento and Washington DC, and Congressman Huffman’s office,) that clarity was reached that a joint application for the creation of a single QZ was the only way to provide a solution that works for all parties. All other ideas and options had been explored and rejected.

- San Rafael submitted their Notice of Intent for a Quiet Zone approximately one month prior to Novato. Both agencies are now beyond the 60-day review period, and are in the process of preparing their Notice of Establishment (NOE). Both agencies only received comments from the CPUC and SMART.
- On September 27, the Novato City Council respectfully requested that the City of San Rafael act as the lead agency to submit a comprehensive Quiet Zone to serve all of Marin
County from San Rafael though unincorporated Marin County to Novato. Attached is a copy of the letter sent to San Rafael.

- Marin County is supportive of the comprehensive Quiet Zone and sent the attached letter to the City of San Rafael.
- There is strong regulatory and train operator support for one Quiet Zone to serve Marin. SMART and the FRA have expressed their desire for one comprehensive Quiet Zone in order to simplify train operations and provide greater consistency and safety for train operators. Both organizations have offered to support an effort to create one comprehensive Quiet Zone.
- The City of San Rafael will hear Novato’s request on Monday, October 3. We will update the Novato City Council on October 4th during this staff report.

Option #2 – **Novato continues forward independently with our own Quiet Zone and** the City Council decides on a **back-up alternative** for the Hamilton State Access Pedestrian Crossing. (See information in Background above.)

**Notice of Establishment**
Regardless of which option is pursued, the final step after the Notice of Intent is completed is for a city to submit a Notice of Establishment (NOE). The NOE is submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration with results from the FRA’s quiet zone risk calculator, a web-based software model with standardized national calculations of risk based on various inputs regarding traffic volumes, physical improvements, etc. Each community’s crossing configuration and traffic volumes are different. There are two ways of establishing the Quiet Zone.

1) **Public Authority Designation**
The simplest is the Public Authority Designation (PAD) process. In following this process, the public authority responsible for grade crossings within its jurisdiction satisfies the Federal Railroad Administration that by applying supplementary safety measures (SSMs) only, the zone will have a risk index below the level of which would have existed with horns (risk index with horns or RIWH). Once the public authority has confirmed via the calculator that the quiet zone meets this standard, and the safety measures have been installed, it is able to designate its own quiet zone. The City of San Rafael already meets the standard and is able to pursue its own City quiet zone through the PAD.

The combined Novato – Marin County – San Rafael quiet zone also qualifies under the simple public authority designation (PAD) process, since the combination of SSM improvements at all the crossings mean that the additional credit for ASMs in Novato (that would trigger the PAA process) is not required. Note to that in establishing a combined quiet zone involving multiple jurisdictions, one jurisdiction becomes applicant on behalf of all of the jurisdictions involved. A simple letter is required informing FRA of the agreement to allow one jurisdiction to establish the zone on the others behalf. Each jurisdiction still maintains its own responsibilities and liabilities for its own crossings within its own jurisdiction.

The combined zone would also capture crossings which otherwise cannot be included within the individual city quiet zones – Hamilton pedestrian/State Access crossing and the private crossings within the open "gap" within the unincorporated County between Novato
and San Rafael city limits. Not only would this advance the timing of establishing QZs in Novato, it also achieves simplified operations for SMART.

2) Public Authority Application
The second process is Public Authority Application (PAA). A quiet zone which requires credit to be obtained in the risk calculation from Alternative Safety Measures (ASMs) in addition to its full SSMs - in order to qualify via the risk calculator, requires an application to Federal Railroad Administration before final approval of the quiet zone can be granted. This process can extend the duration of the final notice of establishment by several months. Provided that the risk calculations follow the required FRA procedure and the crossing improvements are consistent with those originally recommended by the regulatory agencies' diagnostic review prior to the design and installation – this is generally granted. This is the current status of the Novato city-only quiet zone. State officials at FRA have committed to strongly advocating and helping Novato navigate this process in an expedited fashion.

Indemnification and Maintenance Agreements
SMART has told each public authority implementing Quiet Zones that there needs to be an agreement with SMART outlining issues of indemnification, maintenance and damage. These draft agreements are under review and staff anticipate conversations with SMART in the near future.

Employee Commute Benefits and SMART Incentives
As an employer, the City has 198 employees working full-time. Approximately 80% of the City’s workforce lives in Sonoma County and experiences severe commute traffic every day. The City has operated two commuter vans originating in Santa Rosa and serving employees in Sonoma County for many years. With the arrival of SMART, there are options to explore how the City can support and encourage our employees to use SMART. Staff is doing analysis and would like to explore ideas with a Council sub-committee before returning to the full Council for direction.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
In addition to the public meetings and workshops discussed in the “Background” section above, the City has utilized social media to push information out to the public on this specific topic, as well as maintained a SMART Quiet Zone webpage that includes current status, meeting schedules, applicable reference information, links to staff reports and video files of staff presentations to City Council.

Notices for both the August 24, 2016 public workshop and the online survey were mailed to over six hundred Hamilton area residents and property owners within a minimum of 1000-feet from the pedestrian crossing.

The notice for this meeting was the City’s standard agenda outreach including e-notifications, social media, and posting of the agenda.

FISCAL IMPACT
Preparation of a combined QZ application is supported by both cities use of the same consultant during the QZ process. The proposed work would be for the consultant to combine the materials
from the individual NOI packages into a single document. The estimated cost of the proposed work is less than $15,000.

**BACKGROUND LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

March 24, 2015 -- [Council Staff Report on Establishment of Quiet Zones with Attachment](#)
June 14, 2016 -- [Staff Presentation on Quiet Zone Update](#)
August 24, 2016 -- [Community Workshop PowerPoint Presentation](#)

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. 9/28/2016 Novato Letter to City of San Rafael
2. 9/29/2016 Marin County Letter to City of San Rafael
3. Quiet Zone Readiness Overview- San Rafael and Novato
4. Comprehensive Marin Quiet Zone – Key Points and Background Information
September 28, 2016

Mayor Gary Phillips and Members of the San Rafael City Council
City of San Rafael
1400 Fifth Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Mayor Phillips and Members of the San Rafael City Council:

On behalf of the Novato City Council, we are formally and respectfully requesting that the City of San Rafael partner with Novato and Marin County to create a comprehensive Quiet Zone that extends from San Rafael through Novato. The Novato City Council voted unanimously on this urgency item at our meeting on Tuesday, September 27th.

As you are fully aware, both San Rafael and Novato have been working with SMART, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to understand and navigate the complex rules, regulations and process required for the establishment of a Quiet Zone. This is new territory for our elected boards, staff and organizations.

During this process, Novato learned that we are unable to end our Quiet Zone at the Hamilton State Access Pedestrian Crossing. Though not written in FRA regulations, federal policy requires that a Quiet Zone begin and end only at a public road and a railroad track surface crossing. Unfortunately, the Hamilton State Pedestrian Access Crossing does not meet these requirements, therefore, Novato's Quiet Zone ends at Hamilton Parkway. This means that the horns will blow as trains approach this pedestrian crossing and approximately 375 residential units within 1,000 feet will be impacted 30 times a day with substantial horn noise. The Council's only alternative to prevent the noise is to close the crossing. However, this pedestrian crossing, in the heart of Hamilton, provides a safe route to school pathway, easy access to the library, and creates an important neighborhood connection.

We have also received concerns from residents on Novato's southern boundary that are hearing train horn noise from the private crossings in the unincorporated areas of Marin County, the existing gap between San Rafael’s and Novato’s quiet zones.

We don't make this request lightly. Before coming to you, we explored other options that were envisioned as potentially easier (waivers, etc.) with no success. We are appreciative of the time and efforts of Congressman Huffman, SMART, and FRA on these endeavors. We recognize that the timeline is tight, but if we are able to initiate the process for a comprehensive Marin Quiet Zone now, then we will be able to have it established by the end of the year.

There is strong regulatory support for one Quiet Zone to serve Marin. SMART and the FRA have expressed their desire for one comprehensive Quiet Zone in order to simplify train operations and provide greater consistency and safety for train operators. Both organizations have offered to support an effort to create one comprehensive Quiet Zone.

The Federal Railroad Administration has indicated that one agency is required to serve as the lead to submit a revised Notice of Intent for a comprehensive Quiet Zone. It is our understanding that the other involved public agencies (Novato and Marin County) would need to submit a letter of support for the comprehensive Quiet Zone. We request that San
Rafael act as the lead agency which allows your City to be in the driver's seat. We are prepared to help in any way possible to make the comprehensive Quiet Zone a success for Marin.

We understand that there are details and more specific responsibilities that would need to be clarified and memorialized in an agreement or MOU should we move forward together. We pledge to absorb any costs, legal responsibilities, maintenance or other related issues for the portions of the comprehensive Quiet Zone that are within Novato's jurisdiction as if we had our own stand-alone Quiet Zone.

Noise knows no jurisdictional boundaries and as our neighborhoods are already experiencing, its impacts carry far beyond the immediate crossing. This comprehensive Marin Quiet Zone will ensure that the quality of life is maintained for all of Marin residents by ensuring no horn noise on any crossing in Marin County. Closing the gap between Novato and San Rafael and protecting the Hamilton neighborhood is of upmost importance to our City Council and residents. We understand the seriousness of our request, and we sincerely appreciate the City of San Rafael for considering our appeal to work together as neighbors and partners towards creating a comprehensive Quiet Zone for Marin.

Sincerely yours,

Pat Eklund, Mayor
Eric Lucan, Council Member, SMART Board Member

cc: Jim Schutz, City Manager, City of San Rafael
Bill Guerin, Public Works Director, City of San Rafael
Farhad Mansourian, General Manager, SMART
Novato City Council
Cathy Capriola, Interim City Manager, City of Novato
Russ Thompson, Public Works Director, City of Novato

Attachments
NOVATO QUIET ZONE

QUIET ZONE CROSSINGS
- RUSH CREEK PL.
- GOLDEN GATE PL.
- OLIVE AVE.
- GRANT AVE.
- (DT STATION)
- FRANKLIN PED. CROSSING
- HANNA RANCH RD.
- IGNACIO PED. CROSSING
- ROBLAR DRIVE
- HAMILTON PKWY

EXCLUDED:
- STATE ACCESS PED CROSSING
- HAMILTON STATION
- 2 PRIVATE XINGS IN COUNTY
STATE ACCESS ROAD PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

“CURRENT” VIEW TOWARDS HOUSES
View from Pedestrian Crossing
STATE ACCESS ROAD PEDESTRIAN CROSSING
September 29, 2016

Mayor Gary Phillips and Members of the San Rafael City Council
City of San Rafael
1400 Fifth Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Mayor Phillips and Members of the San Rafael City Council:

The County is supportive of the request that the City of San Rafael partner with Marin County and Novato to create a comprehensive Quiet Zone that extends from San Rafael through Novato.

We (the County, San Rafael and Novato) have been working with SMART, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to understand and navigate the complex rules, regulations and process required for the establishment of a Quiet Zone. SMART and the FRA have expressed their desire for one comprehensive Quiet Zone in order to simplify train operations and provide greater consistency and safety for train operators. Both organizations have offered to support an effort to create one comprehensive Quiet Zone.

The FRA has indicated that one agency is required to serve as the lead to submit a revised Notice of Intent for a comprehensive Quiet Zone. We request that San Rafael act as the lead agency. The other involved public agencies (Novato and Marin County) would submit a letter of support for the comprehensive Quiet Zone.

Thank you for considering our appeal to work together as neighbors and partners towards creating a comprehensive Quiet Zone for Marin.

Sincerely,

Matthew Hymel
County Administrator
San Rafael Quiet Zone Readiness Overview

Legend

| Crossing QZ Ready when SMART construction is complete |

SMITH RANCH ROAD  Entry Gates w/ Median

NORTH AVENUE  Entry Gates w/ Median

CIVIC CENTER DRIVE  Entry Gates w/ Medians, Pedestrian Gates & Swing Gates

CIVIC CENTER STATION  HORN WILL SOUND UPON TRAIN DEPARTURE

LAS GALLINAS PED XING  Pedestrian Gates & Swing Gates

N. SAN PEDRO ROAD  Entry Gates w/ Medians

PALOMA AVENUE  Entry Gates

PAC+ECO STREET  Entry Gates

MISSION AVENUE  Quadrant Gates

5TH AVENUE  Quadrant Gates

4TH STREET  Quadrant Gates, Pedestrian Gates & Swing Gates

SAN RAFAEL STATION  HORN WILL SOUND UPON TRAIN DEPARTURE
Novato Quiet Zone Readiness Overview

Legend

Crossing QZ Ready when SMART construction is complete

ATHERTON STATION
HORN WILL SOUND UPON TRAIN DEPARTURE

RUSH CREEK PLACE
Quadrant Gates

GOLDEN GATE PLACE
Entry Gates

OLIVE AVENUE
2 Entry Gates & 1 Exit Gate w/ Median

GRANT AVENUE
2 Entry Gates & 1 Exit Gate w/ Median

FRANKLIN PED XING
Pedestrian Gates & Swing Gates

HANNA RANCH ROAD
Entry Gates w/ Medians

IGNACIO PED XING
Pedestrian Gates & Swing Gates

ROBLARD DRIVE
2 Entry Gates & 1 Exit Gate w/ Median

HAMILTON PARKWAY
Entry Gates w/ Medians

STATE ACCESS PED XING
Pedestrian Gates & Swing Gates

HAMILTON STATION
HORN WILL SOUND UPON TRAIN DEPARTURE

RENAISSANCE ROAD

GRANDVIEW AVENUE

2 Entry Gates & 1 Exit Gate w/ Median

Needs median on East Side of Crossing

Est. $30k Cost
Comprehensive Marin Quiet Zone – Key Points and Background Information

CURRENT STATUS

City of Novato has formally requested that the City of San Rafael partner with Novato to create a comprehensive Quiet Zone that extends from San Rafael through Novato, including the area of unincorporated Marin County.

A Comprehensive Quiet Zone would include the 2 private crossings within Marin County – thereby closing a gap so that all of Marin County would have a Quiet Zone. Only one public agency can submit a Quiet Zone. Novato is asking San Rafael to be the lead agency and submit the Comprehensive Quiet Zone – thereby closing a gap so that all of Marin County would have a Quiet Zone.

City of San Rafael will consider this request on Monday, October 3.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

1. Noise has no jurisdictional boundaries. Our neighborhoods are already experiencing train noise. The noise impacts carry far beyond the immediate crossing.

2. A comprehensive Marin Quiet Zone will ensure that the quality of life is maintained for all of Marin residents by ensuring no horn noise on any crossing in Marin County.

3. A comprehensive Marin Quiet Zone would close a gap currently where there is no Quiet Zone – part of Hamilton and crossings between Novato and San Rafael.

4. A Quiet Zone cannot be changed in the future without rescinding the current Quiet Zone, reinitiating horns at all crossings, and then resubmitting a revised Quiet Zone which can take 81 days.

5. Marin County will not be able to add a Quiet Zone in the future to protect the area between Novato and San Rafael without adjusting both Novato’s and San Rafael’s Quiet Zones since these are two private crossings are not eligible by themselves. The Marin portion will therefore remain “orphaned” outside the quiet zones in perpetuity.

6. Currently, Hamilton State Access Pedestrian Crossing (between Hamilton Parkway and the new Hamilton SMART Station) cannot be included in the Novato Quiet Zone since it is a private, pedestrian crossing. Novato planned on ending the Quiet Zone at this crossing, but was told by FRA officials that a Quiet Zone can only begin and end at a public road and a railroad track surface crossing. 375 residential units within 1,000 feet of this pedestrian crossing will face horn noise 30 times per day.

7. If a comprehensive Quiet Zone is not attainable, the Novato City Council will be faced with back-up options that include:
   a. Retain the Pedestrian Crossing and Install “Wayside Horns” (installing a local “wayside” horn at the crossing that substitutes for the sounding of the locomotive horns, at the same level of intensity as the locomotive horn, but with a smaller noise footprint);
   b. Retain the Pedestrian Crossing and No Southerly Quiet Zone (keeping the crossing open and not having a Quiet Zone in this neighborhood); or,
   c. Remove the Pedestrian Crossing (results in closing the pedestrian pathway)

8. If closed, the neighborhood loses a pedestrian crossing, in the heart of Hamilton, which provides a safe route to school pathway, easy access to the library, and creates an important neighborhood connection.

9. Novato residents living on the southern boundary (senior citizens living in Marin Valley Mobile Country Club for example) are already being impacted by train horn noise from the private crossings in the unincorporated areas of Marin County, the existing gap between San Rafael’s and Novato’s quiet zones.
10. There is strong regulatory agency and rail operator support for one Quiet Zone to serve Marin. SMART and the FRA have expressed their desire for one comprehensive Quiet Zone in order to simplify train operations and provide greater consistency and safety for train operators. Both organizations have offered to support an effort to create one comprehensive Quiet Zone and expedite the process where possible.

11. The Federal Railroad Administration has indicated that one agency is required to serve as the lead to submit a revised Notice of Intent for a comprehensive Quiet Zone. This is a well-established and straightforward process. It is our understanding that the other involved public agencies (Novato and Marin County) would need to inform FRA via letter that the City of San Rafael will be the public authority acting on their behalf in creating the comprehensive Marin Quiet Zone.

12. Allows both Novato and San Rafael to submit the Notice of Establishment using the Public Agency Designation which can be accomplished in 21 days and requires no approval from the Federal Railroad Administration.

QUIET ZONE BACKGROUND

What is a Quiet Zone? A quiet zone is a rail crossing that prohibits the routine sounding of train horns. Federal law requires train horns to be sounded at all public crossings, 24 hours a day, to warn motorists and pedestrians that a train is approaching. Quiet zones, once established, reduce the routine use of train horns. All crossings within SMART’s route have been made “Quiet Zone ready” at SMART’s cost as part of their construction.

Can you still hear train horns in a Quiet Zone? Yes. Horns in quiet zones will be sounded upon departure from a station and at the discretion of the train operator. In addition, Quiet Zones do not impact the bells and ringing associated with rail crossing safety gates.

How is a Quiet Zone Established? To create a Quiet Zone, a public agency has to submit a Notice of Intent to create a Quiet Zone to the owners of each crossing and the regulatory agencies for their input. The notice period is 60 days or until each entity has responded. After these responses, the public agency submits a Notice of Establishment of Quiet Zones. The notice period is generally 21 days and then the horns will no longer be activated at crossings.

Complex state and federal rules and practices around Quiet Zones – San Rafael and Novato have been working with the Federal Railroad Administration, SMART and the California Public Utilities Commission.