



# COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION  
DRIVE, ROOM 102A  
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 12/10/2024

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**To:** Board of Supervisors

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Sonoma County Public Infrastructure

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Johannes J. Hoevertsz, 707-565-2550

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisorial District(s):** Second

**Title:**

Establishment of Revised Quiet Zones at Railroad Crossings in Sonoma County

**Recommended Action:**

- A) Authorize the Director of Sonoma County Public Infrastructure to finalize and execute a cooperative agreement with the City of Petaluma for a joint application to establish quiet zones at railroad crossings in Sonoma County associated with Sonoma Marin Rail Transit operations.
- B) Authorize the Director of SPI to finalize and execute a cooperative agreement with the Cities of Novato and San Rafael, consistent with the terms of the agreement with the City of Petaluma, to the extent the joint quiet zone requires, in a form approved by County Counsel.
- C) Authorize the Director of Sonoma County Public Infrastructure to execute a professional services agreement with RailPros in the amount of \$59,974 to perform quiet zone feasibility and risk calculations and issue a Notice of Intent and Notice of Establishment as required by the Federal Railroad Authority.

**Executive Summary:**

The Sonoma County Department of Public Infrastructure (SPI) is requesting the Board authorize the Director of SPI to finalize and execute cooperative agreements between the Cities of Petaluma, Novato, and San Rafael for the establishment of joint quiet zones associated with Sonoma Marin Rail Transit (SMART) operations. If approved these agreements would establish the County as the lead agency for administrative and procedural purposes allowing for the establishment of a single quiet zone in areas within multiple jurisdictions. In addition, this item also requests the Board approve and authorize the director of SPI to execute a professional services agreement to perform quiet zone feasibility, risk calculations and draft a Notice of Intent and Notice of Establishment as required by the Federal Railroad Authority (FRA).

**Discussion:**

A quiet zone is a section of a rail line at least one-half mile in length that contains one or more consecutive public highway-rail grade crossings at which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded when trains are approaching the crossings. The prohibited use of train horns at quiet zones only applies to trains when approaching and entering crossings and does not include train horn use within passenger stations or rail

yards. In addition, train horns may still be sounded in emergency situations or to comply with other railroad or FRA rules even within a quiet zone. Quiet zone regulations also do not eliminate the use of locomotive bells at crossings. Therefore, a more appropriate description of a designated quiet zone would be a “reduced train horn area.” Communities wishing to establish quiet zones must work through the appropriate public authority that is responsible for traffic control or law enforcement at the crossings.

In order to facilitate the establishment of a quiet zones relating to the SMART rail line within Sonoma County, on December 16, 2016, the Board authorized the Director of SPI (formerly Transportation and Public Works) to:

1. Submit a Notice of Intent (NOI) to establish joint Quiet Zones at Railroad Crossings within Sonoma County
2. Negotiate cooperative agreements with the Cities of Rohnert Park and Cotati regarding joint quiet zone applications.

The NOI was submitted to the Federal Railroad Authority in accordance with Title 49 CFR 222.43 on March 14, 2017, and negotiations for cooperative agreements with the Cities of Rohnert Park and Cotati commenced.

On May 23, 2017, the Board authorized the Director of SPI to execute the negotiated cooperative agreement with the Cities of Rohnert Park and Cotati delegating authority to the County of Sonoma to act as the Lead Authority for the establishment of a joint quiet zone located within multiple adjacent jurisdictions, submit a Notice of Establishment (NOE) after obtaining concurrence from these cities and the installation of required supplemental safety measures. The Board also approved the use of \$800,000 in unused General Fund contingencies to implement these safety measures.

On September 19, 2017, after a competitive selection process, the Board approved and awarded the construction contract for the installation of the railroad quiet zone crossing supplemental safety measures to the Ghilotti Bros. Inc. in the amount of \$633,600. Construction was completed on November 30, 2018. After construction was successfully completed, the initial Quiet Zone was formally established per FRA regulations. With the inclusion of this quiet zone there are currently five established Quiet Zones along the SMART rail line: San Rafael/Novato, Petaluma, Sonoma County (1), Santa Rosa and Sonoma County (2) along the 43 miles and 76 public, private and pedestrian at-grade crossings on the SMART line.

However, even with these individual efforts, there are still approximately six miles along SMART's route without the horn silencing efforts. This area includes ten private crossings between the Novato/San Rafael and Petaluma quiet zones. Because of this lack of quiet zone coverage, property owners in the area are concerned that their community/homes will be the only ones with horns regularly sounding at these crossings. This includes six private crossings in Sonoma County, four private crossings located in Marin County, and three crossings within the City of Novato. On November 28, 2018, SPI entered into an agreement with the consulting firm, Mark Thomas to prepare FRA waiver applications for these ten private crossings.

On April 6, 2021, the Board authorized the chair to execute a cooperative agreement with the County of Marin establishing the County of Sonoma as the Lead Authority, allowing the Director of SPI to take further action to establish a joint quiet zone which would include the private crossings discussed previously. Approval of this item will allow the Director of SPI to enter into cooperative agreements with the Cities of Petaluma, Novato,

and San Rafael. The agreements will allow Sonoma County to proceed with establishment of the Joint Quiet Zone which will include the affected private crossings in both counties. In addition, Sonoma County will serve as Lead Authority for the jurisdictions of Novato and Petaluma in establishing this new Joint Quiet Zone.

Establishment of the joint quiet zone requires that certain Supplemental Safety Measures be installed so that the Quiet Zone Risk Index for the subject grade crossing is at or below the Risk Index with Horns. Upon the Board's approval of this item, the Director of SPI will also be authorized to enter into an agreement with RailPros to complete a risk assessment of all quiet zone crossings within the newly outlined boundaries and assist with the drafting of both the NOI and NOE for the amended joint quiet zone.

**Strategic Plan:**

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

**Pillar:** Climate Action and Resiliency

**Goal:** Goal 2: Invest in the community to enhance resiliency and become carbon neutral by 2030

**Objective:** Objective 2: Invest in the County's employee Clean Commute program to promote use of alternate modes of transportation, including bike and carpool incentives, and last mile solutions connecting bus and train stations to County worksites.

**Racial Equity:**

**Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

**Prior Board Actions:**

On April 6, 2021, the Board authorized the chair to execute a cooperative agreement with the County of Marin establishing the County of Sonoma as the Lead Authority, allowing the Director of SPI to take further action to establish a joint quiet zone.

December 13, 2016 - Board authorized submittal of a Notice of Intent for Quiet Zones at Railroad Crossings within Sonoma County and authorized the Director of SPI (formerly TPW) to negotiate cooperative agreements with the Cities of Rohnert Park and Cotati regarding joint quiet zone applications.

May 23, 2017 - Board authorized the Director of SPI to execute the negotiated cooperative agreement with the Cities of Rohnert Park and Cotati delegating authority to the County of Sonoma to act as the Lead Authority. The Board also approved the use of \$800,000 in unused General Fund contingencies for quiet zone related expenses.

September 19, 2017 - Board approved and awarded a construction contract to Ghilotti Bros. to install required supplemental safety measures.

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY24-25 Adopted</b>	<b>FY25-26 Projected</b>	<b>FY26-27 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses	\$59,974		
Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$59,974</b>		
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies (General Fund contingencies transferred to Road Fund in 2017)	\$59,974		
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$59,974</b>		

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

Appropriations for the agreement with RailPros are included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Roads Administration Budget (11051-34010101). On May 23, 2017, The Board allocated \$800,000 in unused General Fund contingencies for SMART Quiet Zone related expenses. To date SPI has expended \$648,516 on the construction of supplemental safety measures and quiet zone application and waiver preparation. There is \$151,484 remaining that will be used to fund this agreement.

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

None.

**Attachments:**

- Resolution
- Map of Proposed Combined Quiet Zone Railroad Crossings
- City of Petaluma-Sonoma County Agreement

**Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:**

- Establishment of Quiet Zones