



# COUNTY OF SONOMA

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

## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 4/28/2026

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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, Third, Fourth, Fifth

**Title:**

Authorize and Direct the Director of Sonoma Public Infrastructure to take all necessary steps to effectuate the Joint Quiet Zone, with the Cities of Petaluma, Novato, San, Rafael, Healdsburg, Rohnert Park, Cotati and the Town of Windsor, including modifications of existing Quiet Zone, submission to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and notification to impacted agencies under existing agreements.

**Recommended Action:**

Authorize and Direct the Director of Sonoma Public Infrastructure to take all necessary steps to effectuate the Joint Quiet Zone, including modifying existing Quiet Zone boundaries between Marin and Sonoma Counties, submitting required notifications to the Federal Railroad Administration (Notice of Intent and Notice of Establishment), notifying affected agencies, and implementing additional safety improvements as necessary.

**Executive Summary:**

The Sonoma County Department of Public Infrastructure (SPI) is requesting the Board to authorize the Director of SPI to take all necessary steps to establish a Joint Quiet Zone at railroad crossings within multiple jurisdictions in Sonoma and Marin Counties along the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) corridor. This includes implementing additional safety improvements, modifying existing quiet zones, submitting a Notice of Intent (NOI) and Notice of Establishment (NOE) to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and notifying impacted agencies under existing agreements.

**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. To date, SPI has expended \$692,389 on the construction of supplemental safety measures and quiet zone application and waiver preparation, leaving \$107,611 remaining.

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 Sonoma County as the Lead Authority and allowing the Director of SPI to take further action to establish a joint quiet zone that would include the previously identified private crossings. To continue this effort, on December 10, 2024, the Board authorized the Director of SPI to enter into cooperative agreements with the Cities of Petaluma, Novato, and San Rafael, allowing Sonoma County to serve as Lead Authority for the jurisdictions of Novato and Petaluma in establishing the Joint Quiet Zone, which will include the affected private crossings in both counties. All cooperative agreements with neighboring agencies to establish the Joint Quiet Zone are not in place as shown in the attachment. The Board also authorized the

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Director of SPI 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 drafting both the NOI and NOE for the amended joint quiet zone, in compliance with required Supplemental Safety Measures to ensure that the Quiet Zone Risk Index for each crossing meets or is below the Risk Index with horns.

Establishing the Joint Quiet Zone will:

- Eliminate gaps between existing quiet zones along the SMART corridor
- Provide consistent administration and reporting to the FRA
- Improve quality of life for communities adjacent to the rail line by reducing routine horn use
- Maintain existing railroad safety standards

Participating jurisdictions will continue to maintain railroad crossings located within their respective boundaries. The Lead Authority role is administrative in nature and does not transfer liability for crossing maintenance or operations.

If approved, this item will authorize the Director of SPI to take all necessary actions to establish the Joint Quiet Zone, including coordinating with participating jurisdictions, implementing required modifications, and submitting a Notice of Intent (NOI) and Notice of Establishment (NOE) to the FRA.

**Strategic Plan:**

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

**Pillar:** Resilient Infrastructure

**Goal:** Goal 3: Continue to invest in critical road, bridge, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure.

**Objective:** Objective 1: Continue to maintain road segments, including designated turnouts where feasible, increase efforts on vegetation removal and drainage features, and improve pavement conditions in neighborhoods.

**Racial Equity:**

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

No

**Prior Board Actions:**

December 10, 2024 - the Board authorized the Director of SPI to execute cooperative agreements with the Cities of Petaluma, Novato, and San Rafael and a professional services agreement with RailPros.

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.

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

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.

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.

## **FISCAL SUMMARY**

### **Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with this Board Action.

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

None.

### **Attachments:**

Proposed Joint Quiet Zone Map

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

Agreement with Petaluma

Agreement with Rohnert Park and Cotati

Agreement with County of Marin

Agreement for Joint Quiet Zone- Novato and San Rafael