



MEMORANDUM

TO: Randy Young, City Manager
FROM: Tim Paranto, Director of Public Works
CC:
DATE: January 8, 2007
SUBJECT: Railroad Quiet Zones

Many Wheat Ridge residents hear the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) trains traveling along the north side of Clear Creek Valley to and from Coors (commonly called the beer train). The railroad runs across Arvada and Wheat Ridge adjacent to Ridge Road and Grandview Avenue. In addition to daytime trains, there is usually one train west-bound and one train east-bound each evening. Until recent enactment of Federal legislation, train engineers had discretion on whether warning whistles were sounded at each roadway crossing. Current regulations require two whistle blasts at each road crossing irrespective of time of day or local crossing traffic. With the change in procedures, the evening whistle blasts have become an annoyance to some residents.

Along with the new Federal regulation requiring the whistle blasts, a procedure to create "quiet zones" along sections of rail lines was provided. Unfortunately, extensive protection must be constructed at each crossing (\$200,000 to \$400,000) and there are minimum lengths of "quiet zones". There have been no "quiet zones" created in Colorado at this time, while several cities are pursuing the noise restriction. In the case of the "beer train", there are fifteen crossings from Sheridan Boulevard to Ward Road, most of which are in Arvada. Arvada has investigated the implementation of "quiet zones" and is not prioritizing the BNSF along Ridge Road and Grandview Avenue. Arvada Staff suggest that the cities work toward a "quiet zone" along the BNSF in conjunction with the development and construction of the RTD FasTracks Gold Line.

In conclusion, the railroads are required to sound the whistles at each crossing, even late at night when there are no motorists on the streets. Most of the objectionable railroad whistle noise originates while the trains are in Arvada. Arvada does not have resources to develop, or partner in developing, a "quiet zone" along the BNSF tracks. The Gold Line will add more trains to this route and, therefore, more whistle noise. It would be appropriate that the FasTracks project include development of a "quiet zone" across Arvada and Wheat Ridge.