



CITY OF MUSCATINE PRESS RELEASE

215 Sycamore, Muscatine, Iowa 52761 • 563.264.1550



Signs are in place as the Canadian Pacific Quiet Zone through Muscatine's downtown area goes into effect at 12:01 a.m. Friday, Feb. 23, 2018. This sign is located at the pedestrian crossing at Iowa Avenue and reminds pedestrians to look both ways for oncoming trains since no train horn will be sounded on their approach to the crossing. Each pedestrian crossing features these signs and additional signage on "No Train Horns" can be found at each rail grade crossing.

For more information, contact: Kevin Jenison, Communication Manager,
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 22, 2018

QUIET ZONE GOES INTO EFFECT FRIDAY IN MUSCATINE

Years of work pays off with establishment of train horn free zone

MUSCATINE, Iowa –Listen closely Muscatine residents. What do you hear? Or rather, what do you not hear?

That clickety-clack of the railroad track as a train passes through the downtown area is not accompanied by the high decibel blast of the horn announcing the arrival of the passing train.

We have ... a Quiet Zone.

Effective at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 23, 2018, the Canadian Pacific (CP) engineers will not be blowing the locomotives horn on their approach to crossings from the Norbert F. Beckey Bridge to Carver Corner in Muscatine.

“It has been years in the making,” Dave Gobin, Community Development Director for the City of Muscatine, said.

In fact, Canadian Pacific was the one who brought the idea to the City of Muscatine.

“They contacted us and wanted to establish a Quiet Zone in Muscatine,” Gobin said. “Sparked by their interest, the idea just snowballed from there.”

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Canadian Pacific notified the City of Muscatine on February 8, 2018, that they accepted the “Notice of Establishment” for the City of Muscatine’s new quiet zone and would honor the new 24 hour quiet zone.

The City of Muscatine worked with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Office of Rail Transportation in the Iowa Department of Transportation, Canadian Pacific, and the engineering firm of Bolton & Menk to establish the Quiet Zone in Muscatine.

The inclusion of the Quiet Zone with the reconstruction of Mississippi Drive is more a convenience than a planned event. Both projects have been on the radar of public officials and private citizens for many years and the timing for implementation of the Quiet Zone occurred after the Mississippi Drive project was started.

“This was private money that funded most of the improvements for the Quiet Zone,” Gobin said.

And despite what a lot of people have suggested, it had nothing to do with construction and opening of the Merrill Hotel.

“There are many studies out there that correlation a reduction of noise level to an increase in property value, especially in a downtown area,” Gobin said.

The maximum volume level for the train horn is 110 decibels and the minimum is 96 decibels according to the FRA. The noise level is reduced by almost half without the horn sounding.

“Businesses who are conducting meetings have to interrupt those meetings because of the train noise,” Gobin said. “That is not good for business and not good in trying to keep business in Muscatine.”

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The main purpose of establishing the Quiet Zone was to assist businesses and to assist residences who live near the railroad tracks in the downtown area.

“Every 10 decibels that we can reduce that noise increases the value of the property affected by that noise,” Gobin said. “The Quiet Zone also makes the downtown area a better place to live and creates a better atmosphere for investment.”

Although the Quiet Zone was privately funded (not a single tax dollar used), it still took the City of Muscatine working with Canadian Pacific along with state and federal agencies to bring the zone into reality.

It took years to go from the study and planning stages to the actual construction of the safety measures, and to the actual establishment of the Quiet Zone.

“Canadian Pacific was good to work with and we received some good guidance from the FRA,” Gobin said. “All parties involved wanted to see a Quiet Zone established in Muscatine but safety was the biggest issue. I believe this is another positive move forward in the development of the riverfront and downtown areas.”

THE QUIET ZONE

According to FRA guidelines, 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. Train horns may be sounded, however, in emergency situations or to comply with other railroad or FRA rules.

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The two rail grade crossings in this section are at Cedar Street and Iowa Avenue but four pedestrian crossings were also included in the study, design, and implementation of the Quiet Zone. Those pedestrian crossings are located at Mad Creek, Sycamore Street, Chestnut Street, and Hershey Avenue. The Mad Creek and Hershey Avenue crossings are part of the Muscatine trail system.

Each of these crossings required pre-approved Supplementary Safety Measures (SSMs) or Alternative Safety Measures (ASMs) to maximize safety and minimize risk.

LOOK BOTH WAYS BEFORE CROSSING THE TRACKS

Most of us remember being taught as a child to look both ways before crossing a street. The same lesson is valid for pedestrian railroad crossings especially in a Quiet Zone.

Each pedestrian crossing within the Quiet Zone was secured with a fence to separate the area of the crossing from the railroad right-of-way. A chicane was installed on the path of the crossing that forces pedestrians to look both ways for oncoming train traffic before exiting the chute and safely crossing the railroad tracks.

“We have already received a lot of public comment on the chicanes located at the trail crossings,” Gobin said. “This is the feedback we want. The first month of the Quiet Zone will be a learning period and an evaluation of the installed safety measures.”

Plans are already being developed to expand the chicanes on the trail crossings to accommodate tandem bicycles and bicycles pulling carts.

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“The objective of the chicanes located at the trail crossings is to have the riders dismount their bicycles, walk through the chicane, and walk across the railroad tracks after looking both ways for oncoming trains,” Gobin said. “That purpose will not change with the new design.”

FOUR-QUADRANT GATE FOR STREET CROSSINGS

Another safety feature implemented for the Quiet Zone was the upgrade of the crossing arms at the two rail grade crossings located at Cedar Street and Iowa Avenue from two to four arms.

The two-quadrant gate that most drivers are familiar with drops down to block entry to the crossing within 15-20 seconds of the trains' arrival. But that leaves the exit lanes open and an invitation for some to drive around the gates before the train arrives. The impending arrival of the train, previously announced by the train horn, may not be noticed in a Quiet Zone creating an unsafe situation.

The four-quadrant gate has proven to be the best method to improve safety and reduce risk in Quiet Zones but has been used at other crossings as well. The use of four gates, two to block entry into the crossing and two to block exit from the crossing, encourages drivers to remain safely behind the gates and not drive around them. Other SSMs options available were installing medians or channelization devices, creating one-way streets with gates, and temporarily or permanently closing the crossing.

“Because of the location of the crossings and the safety benefits, the four quadrant gate system was our best option,” Gobin said.

The entry gates act as they always have, dropping down 15-20 seconds before a train arrives and blocking entry onto the crossing. The exit gates act to block the road leading away from the

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crossing and begin their descent into the horizontal position at least four seconds after the entry gates are activated.

The delay of the exit arms allow vehicles to avoid being trapped once drivers proceed onto the crossing. The exit gates are also equipped with sensors that can detect a vehicle while they are descending. If a vehicle is detected, the arms will rise until the vehicle clears and then the arms descend again to the horizontal position.

THE FUTURE

Extending the Quiet Zone into the south end of Muscatine may not be on the drawing board yet and it may be many years before the zone is extended due to the number of crossings involved, the securing of funding, and the Grandview Avenue Revitalization Project progress. The City of Muscatine believes that improving rail crossing safety and reducing train noise is important.

“I do believe that in the future we will be able to bring public and private resources together to extend the quiet zone,” Gobin said. “For now we will closely watch the first month of operation of the current zone and see what refinements we need to make.”

For the present residents and visitors, restaurant guests and businesses can listen for the far off sound of the train horn because it is far off.

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