

# Recap Of Railroad Quiet Zone Presentation Given At City Council

By Leslie Lerner

On Tuesday, October 14th a Quiet Zone presentation was given to the Eagle Lake City Council and interested citizens. Prior to that date, citizens were encouraged to attend by word of mouth, email and the Eagle Lake Headlight.

Very few people attended. This meeting was very informative and discussed the creation of a Quiet Zone, implementation of safety measures, the safety and liability involved in creating a Quiet Zone.

Since this meeting there has been a lot of "second or third-hand" conversations about what was discussed. The following is an attempt to educate those who were not in attendance and do not understand what a Quiet Zone is, the safety and what it could do for Eagle Lake.

Train horns have provided a significant warning that a train is approaching for over 100 years. Local residents and businesses often view the sound as a nuisance and unnecessary. Communities that have several trains coming through town per day, the problem can deter new business, visitors and residents.

Elimination of the train horn noise improves the quality of life for residents, tourists and businesses. While eliminating the train horn, communities must balance the safety implications of railroad operations with the absence of train horn warnings. Communities, safety regulators and operating railroads must strive to maintain a high level of public safety when implementing a Quiet Zone.

How many Downtown Eagle Lake businesses or community organizations have to put meetings or phone calls on hold because one of the 24+ trains per day is coming through town?

How many Eagle Lake citizens are under the assumption that a Quiet Zone is very expensive and is not as safe as the trains with horns? A quiet zone is not expensive, is safer than the risk with horns and you can have meetings and phone calls without the distraction of a train horn!

A quiet zone is a section of a rail line that contains one or more consecutive crossings at which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded. The crossings being discussed in Eagle Lake are Beaks, Lake, Commerce, McCarty, Walnut and Stevenson. After working closely with the Federal Railroad Administration, Texas Department of Public Safety, Union Pacific, Amtrak and Kansas City Southern Railroad possible scenarios have been discussed.

Nothing has been set in stone and solutions are still being discussed at this time.

Per the FRA's Train Horn Rule that went in effect June 24, 2005 communities are able to establish Quiet Zones by reducing the risk caused by lack of horns.

This means if the risk of an accident is less than the risk with horns, the FRA will approve a Quiet Zone as long as proper safety measures are implemented.

To this date, many Quiet Zones have been established across the US as well as Texas in large and small cities. Many small communities, just like Eagle Lake, have either created or in the process of creating Quiet Zones.

For example, at this time, Wallis, with a population of less than 1,500, is discussing the possibilities of a Quiet Zone with Texas Department of Transportation and the other agencies.

They are preparing for the future as Houston is moving further and further out. Why would Eagle Lake forgo this opportunity to move forward and be as desirable of place to live and work as our neighbors and other US cities?

Interstate-10 does not run through or around Eagle Lake because the future benefits were not assessed at the time.

This has significantly lowered the possibilities of Eagle Lake procuring new businesses, attracting residents and tourists, and most of all collecting property and sales tax dollars.

Presently, Eagle Lake is in great need of revenue due to decisions made in the past. Can Eagle Lake afford to make the same mistake again?

Eagle Lake is fortunate. Each crossing involved already has the warning devices necessary for creating a Quiet Zone.

This eliminates much of the expense. With constant warning equipment, gate arms and signage that are required by the FRA already in place, the City

would only be responsible for installing concrete medians, curbs and/or barricades and additional signage/markings.

The FRA's Quiet Zone calculator estimates the cost of the Eagle Lake Quiet Zone to be less than \$50,000 and the risk index to be lower than it is at this time with horns. Raising \$50,000 through private donations, assistance from Union Pacific and Texas Department of Transportation,

Zone Calculator indicated, installing concrete medians, curbs and/or barricades and additional signage Eagle Lake's crossings will be safer than they are now.

How many times have you seen vehicles drive around the gate arms? This will not be possible with a Quiet Zone. Once curbs and medians are installed per FRA and TX Dot standards, vehicles will not be able to get around the gate arm to the other

the horn.

The train horn will be sounded if an emergency situation arises in order to provide an audible warning to motorists, pedestrians, trespassers, train crews or others in order to prevent injury, death or property damage.

The horn will also sound if the train crew is aware that automatic warning devices are not functioning properly in accordance with FRA regulations or if there are workmen alongside the track in accordance with another FRA regulation.

Once a Quiet Zone is established, the FRA can review the status at any time. Eagle Lake's Quiet Zone will be subject to annual reviews.

If accidents occur at any of the crossings, the City will either risk rises, the Quiet Zone Risk Index have to take additional steps to enhance the safety of the Quiet Zone or the City will lose Quiet Zone status.

All in all, the City of Eagle Lake has taken the steps to investigate the possibilities of a Quiet Zone. Nothing has been established and planning is not complete.

In the following weeks discussions will be held with the Police Chief, Fire Chief and others to accommodate their concerns and suggestions.

If you have questions or concerns, I urge you to call me and get the information first hand. I can be reached at 713-443-8888 or lesliel@flash.net. I will assure you, before a Quiet Zone is established there will be public informational meetings.

I urge you to attend these meetings and be involved in the future of your community.

In closing, the City of Eagle Lake must "change" in order to move forward and be able to compete with surrounding cities for business, residents and tourists. The City has been resistant

to change and has treaded water for many years. The City is now in financial trouble.

"Change" sometimes is a bit overwhelming for people, but with an open mind, an eye to the future and the ability to adapt, Eagle Lake can thrive.

A Quiet Zone may minimally alter your route, but we have to be willing to give a little to get A LOT! The future of Eagle Lake is in your hands. Eagle Lake is in your prosper or continue as it is with very little money for needed improvements and maintenance.



what can this be a reality!

What is the FRA's Quiet Zone Calculator? The Quiet Zone Calculator enables local planners to consider a variety of options that could reduce risk levels to those necessary for the establishment of quiet zones. The Quiet Zone Calculator is designed to:

1. Perform the necessary calculations used to determine the existing risk levels at crossings along corridors.
2. Re-calculate the risk indexes to reflect implementation of safety measures.
3. Show corridor risk levels relative to the risk levels needed for compliance with the Quiet Zone establishment requirements.

To use this internet-based computer tool effectively, accurate information about the current physical and operational characteristics of the relevant crossings must be used.

That is, the National Highway-Rail Crossing Inventory record of each affected crossing must reflect current conditions and future safety measures must be accounted for.

The Quiet Zone calculator is a very precise calculation. When calculating Eagle Lake's risk it took into account: daily vehicle traffic counts, the number of trains per day, the speed of the trains, the last five year's accident data (there have not been any accidents at these crossings), currently installed safety devices and more.

Once all information was entered and calculated, the Quiet

zone of the tracks without the gate arm in an upright position.

Median barriers effectively seal the crossing by containing vehicles in the approach direction after the gate is activated.

As the gate extends out to the median, vehicles are unable to move laterally, over the median without backing up beyond the length of the median. Not only is this the safest option, concrete is also one of the lower cost choices.

In addition to making the crossings safer, the City will not take on any additional liability due to the horns not sounding. The city's liability remains the same as it is today with the horns sounding. As long as the City and/or citizens pledge to maintain the medians and signage, the City will not put itself at any additional risk.

The City and railroad companies will strictly follow the guidelines within the FRA Train Horn Rule to eliminate or limit any liability involved with Quiet Zone projects.

Deviations from the FRA guidelines will not be allowed by the City. The City also pledges to promote driver/pedestrian/cyclist (individual) responsibility for increased attentiveness due to the silencing of the horns and no longer having the horn alert them to the approaching train.

Creating a Quiet Zone does not mean the horns will never be sounded. There are several circumstances in which the locomotive engineer may sound

**Pastor's Aide will be selling fish plates**  
**Saturday, Oct. 25 starting at 11 a.m.**  
**Plates are \$7 each and will consist of fried fish, green beans, corn, cake and bread.**  
**Call 979-234-2423 or 979-453-1279.**  
*Thank you in advance for your support.*

"Quinceanera"  
 Happy 15th Birthday  
 Christina!



Love,  
 All your family and friends

**Lordy, Lordy,  
 Look Who's 40!**

Happy Belated Birthday  
 Valarie!



Love, Your Family

## Fall Festival

Fundraiser for the  
 Retirement Celebration for

The Rev.  
 Dr. Obie Rhodes

E.H. Henry Park  
 ("Flat Area" - old E.H.  
 Henry School area)

Saturday, October 25,  
 2008  
 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

# Thursday & Saturday is Dollar Day at

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11 am to 1 pm

All Tea and Soft Drinks \$1

Chicken Fried Steak and  
 Mashed Potatoes - \$5.49

Cheese Enchiladas w/Rice  
 and Beans - \$5.49

Grilled Chicken Salad - \$5.99

no changes or exceptions

201 Boothe Drive • Eagle Lake

We thought of you with love today, but that is nothing new. We thought about you yesterday and days before that too.

We think of you in silence, we often speak your name. Now all we have is memories and your picture in a frame.

Your memory is our keepsake with which we'll never part. God has you in his keeping, we have you in our heart.

Gone But Not Forgotten  
 We all love you...  
 But God loves you the best  
 Happy Birthday

From your sisters  
 Betty, Fannie, Mamie, Sharon, Evelyn, Katie