



REPORT NO. CCDC-07-34
RTC-07-133

DATE ISSUED: July 25, 2007

ATTENTION: Honorable Chair and Members of the Redevelopment Agency
Council President and City Council
Docket of July 31, 2007

ORIGINATING DEPT.: Engineering & Capital Projects

SUBJECT: G Street One-Way Eastbound Conversion and installation of angle parking from Pacific Highway to Front Street and Certification of a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Downtown San Diego Train Whistle Quiet Zone

COUNCIL DISTRICT: District 2

REFERENCE: None

STAFF CONTACT: Patti Boekamp, 619-236-6274

REQUESTED ACTION: That the San Diego City Council (“Council”) and the Redevelopment Agency of the City of San Diego (“Agency”) take such actions as necessary for the conversion of G Street from two-way to one-way eastbound from Pacific Highway to Front Street, including diagonal parking on the north side of G Street from Pacific Highway to Front Street and the installation of necessary signs, markings, and traffic signal modifications of G Street; and the certification of the Mitigated Negative Declaration (“MND”) for the Downtown San Diego Quiet Zone.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Agency:

- Certify the Final Mitigated Declaration and adopt the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program with respect to the Quiet Zone project.

That the Council:

- Approve the conversion of G Street to one-way eastbound operation from Pacific Highway to Front Street as a condition of the proposed Downtown San Diego Quiet Zone;

- Approve the installation of angle parking on the north side of G Street between Pacific Highway and Front Street in conjunction with the conversion of G Street to one-way operation;
- State for the record that the final Mitigated Negative Declaration has been reviewed and considered prior to approving the project;
- Direct the City Clerk to file a Notice of Determination

SUMMARY :

Background

Downtown San Diego, like many urban environments with large population growth, has had an increase in residents adjacent to railroad tracks and crossings. As the area along the rail corridor has transitioned from industrial to residential and recreational uses, the noise associated with the sounding of locomotive and trolley horns has become a major concern to residents and hotel visitors. Train horns, especially during the nighttime hours, can have a significant negative impact on the quality of life of the residents.

On January 31, 2000, Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting the use of train whistles in downtown San Diego between the hours of 11:00pm and 6:00am except in emergencies. However, this has not proven to be effective. Therefore, we are pursuing the option through a new rule by the Federal Railroad Administration of a "Quiet Zone" designation that would prohibit the use of train horns.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is addressing this quality-of-life issue with its Final Rule for the Use of Locomotive Horns at Highway-Rail Crossings. In this rule, the FRA has set out the regulatory procedures and technical requirements necessary for the implementation of a Quiet Zone in which train horn noise may be reduced. It is important to note that the rules limit, but not completely prohibit, the sounding of horns. Examples of continued use are the requirement to sound the horns when starting and stopping at stations, and in emergencies.

Proposed Improvements

The City and CCDC are working towards the implementation of a Downtown San Diego Quiet Zone to improve the quality of life for downtown residents and visitors by reducing train whistle noise throughout the day, but especially late at night. To do so, additional safety improvements will need to be made at each of Downtown's 13 rail crossings from Park Boulevard to Laurel Street. These improvements include but are not limited to: additional crossing gates and/or center medians to prevent wrong-way drivers from entering a crossing; pedestrian gates where visibility is limited by adjacent buildings or other structures; and traffic signal modifications, new railroad crossing signals, and pre-signals. Not all of these improvements will be required at all locations.

Actions relating to the installation of these improvements will be brought to Council at a later date.

Conversion of G Street to One-Way Operation

The trolley and freight tracks cross diagonally through the intersection of Kettner Boulevard and G Street. This limits the Quiet Zone design options to either closing one or both streets, or converting one or both streets to one-way operation. It is not possible to use other options such as medians only, or upgrading the intersection to quad gates, to meet the Quiet Zone requirements.

Two traffic studies commissioned by CCDC (by Korve Engineering and by Wilson & Company) indicated that closure of either Kettner Boulevard or G Street would result in significant impacts to traffic circulation in the western portion of downtown. Converting Kettner Boulevard to one-way southbound would also have significant impacts due to the absence of east-west connections south of Broadway. Converting G Street to one-way eastbound from Pacific Highway to Front Avenue has been determined to have the least negative impact to traffic circulation. This conversion would also result in G Street being one-way eastbound from Pacific Highway all the way through downtown to 17th Street and the entrance to State Route 94, and is consistent with the Downtown Master Plan.

Council approval is required for designating a one-way street or alley, according to Municipal Code Section 82.19.

During the public outreach for the G Street one-way conversion, the residents adjacent to the one-way eastbound conversion expressed concerns about adding a third eastbound lane. It was felt that the additional lane, in conjunction with the one-way conversion, would result in higher traffic speeds. The residents strongly supported angle parking on the north curb of G Street between Pacific Highway and Front Street. This input was incorporated into the design, resulting in a net increase of 10 parking spaces. In addition, the angle parking serves as a traffic calming device and as a buffer between the street and Pantoja Park. Council approval is required for the installation of angle parking, per Section 22503 of the California Vehicle Code and Section 86.03 of the Municipal Code.

Environmental Review

CCDC prepared an Initial Study in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines as amended October 1998 and the San Diego Redevelopment Agency's Procedures for Implementation of CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines. The Agency then prepared a draft Mitigated Negative Declaration that was advertised in the *Daily Transcript* on February 26, 2007, and distributed to Federal, State, County, and City agencies as well as interested groups and individuals.

The Draft MND concluded that the conversion of G Street to one-way between Harbor Drive and Front Street would have a significant impact on the level of service at the following two intersections as buildout occurs within downtown San Diego: (1) G Street/State Street; and (2) Broadway/State Street. The MND further concluded that implementation of specific improvements at each of the affected intersections would reduce this impact to below a level of significance. The required improvements are identified in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.

Two comments were received during the public input period and are included in Attachment A. Neither of these letters identified any new impacts or mitigation measures related to the proposed G Street conversion. Thus, no modifications to the results or conclusions of the MND are necessary.

It is recommended that the Agency certify the Final MND, which concluded that the proposed Quiet Zone Project and the associated roadway and/or crossing changes would not have a significant impact on the environment with implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS: This action only approves the conversion, and has no fiscal impact. The estimated \$529,000 capital cost to implement the conversion will be paid by CCDC and will be brought for action later with the entire Quiet Zone project.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL and/or COMMITTEE ACTION:

On January 31, 2000, the City Council adopted Ordinance 18744, amending the Municipal Code to create Section 85.28, prohibiting the use of train whistles in downtown San Diego between the hours of 11:00pm and 6:00am except in emergencies.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS:

On March 3, 2005, a public workshop was held to present the Quiet Zone design and update to the public. The design included the G Street conversion to a one-way street. Public comment and input from the meeting was gathered for incorporation into the Quiet Zone design. Over 100 people attended the meeting.

On January 5, 2006, a public notification meeting for the one-way conversion of G Street and Quiet Zone status update was held. Over 1,800 meeting notification letters were mailed to adjacent property owners, email notifications were sent to the Corporation email list, and letters were hand-delivered to adjacent property owners. Approximately 70 people attended the meeting. The majority of the attendees supported the Quiet Zone project as improving their quality of life.

On July 17, 2006, a Quiet Zone public update meeting was held. The meeting was chaired by Councilmember Kevin Faulconer and Corporation President Nancy Graham. Nearly 300 people attended the meeting. An overall project update was provided by Corporation staff, followed by a presentation by LeeAnn Dickson of the Federal Railroad Administration. Ms. Dickson responded to resident and business complaints concerning train horns. The BNSF Railway, North County Transit District (Coaster), and Metropolitan Transit System (Trolley) also had representatives present to answer questions and to assure commitment to the community to move the project forward.

On February 26, 2007, a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the project was circulated for a 30-day public comment period ending March 28, 2007. The Mitigated Negative Declaration requests comments on the environmental issues evaluated for the Quiet Zone project, and contains a description of the project work.

On May 30, 2007, the CCDC Board recommended (5-0) that the City Council approve the G Street One-Way Conversion and the MND.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS & PROJECTED IMPACTS:

Downtown San Diego residents and hotel guests will benefit from the reduction of train whistle noise late at night.

Some downtown residents along the G Street corridor may need to alter travel routes because of the conversion of G Street to one-way operation.

An increase of 10 parking spaces on the north side of G Street will be provided to local residents and visitors.

CONCLUSION

Approval of the recommended actions would allow the Quiet Zone Project to move forward by approving the G Street one-way conversion and certifying the environmental document. The Quiet Zone Project will improve the quality of life for downtown residents.

Patti Boekamp
Director, Engineering & Capital Projects

Richard F. Haas
Deputy Chief of Public Works

Attachment: Final Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Downtown San Diego Quiet Zone