

**Policy on the Establishment of  
Railroad Quiet Zones  
Within Kootenai County  
(2019)**



Photo Credit: Bruce Kelly

**Prepared by: Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization's  
Kootenai County Area Transportation Team  
Subcommittee on Railroad Quiet Zones**



The *Policy on the Establishment of Railroad Quiet Zones Within Kootenai County (2019)* was adopted by the Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization (KMPO) Board on May 9, 2019.



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Jim Kaackman, KMPO Board Chair

**Disclaimer:** This policy has been developed and established by the Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization (KMPO) through funding provided through Title 23 U.S.C. Section 134 and Title 49 U.S.C. Section 5303 as part of the Federal Metropolitan Planning requirements administered by the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administration's. The policies and recommendations set forth within this document are solely those of the Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization, and not those of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

### **Purpose and Need for a Railroad Quiet Zone Policy:**

The purpose of this policy is to establish area-wide guidance on the establishment of Railroad Quiet Zones within Kootenai County. The additional purpose is to identify a location(s) where KMPO and member agencies could support the establishment of a Quiet Zone(s).

The need for a Railroad Quiet Zone Policy has been identified as a result of growth and development along railroad corridors throughout the County. The use of rail for freight transport has been a part of the regional landscape for over a century. However, with increased development in Kootenai County, there has been increased conflict between residents and trains, due to the required frequent use of horns at a number of grade crossings. Trains are required by federal law to sound their horns at all grade crossings unless the crossing is within a designated Quiet Zone. Additionally, there is planned expansion of railroad infrastructure and the potential for increased rail traffic in coming years. At this time, it is important to acknowledge the importance of rail transport in the area but also the need to maintain the safety and quality of life of local residents.

While it is apparent that train horn noise can have a significant impact on residential and commercial development in Kootenai County, the need for such a policy has also been identified in order to provide structure for establishing Quiet Zones. Kootenai County has almost 60 rail at grade crossings, and while each one is a source of train horn-related noise, it is not feasible to think all crossings can be silenced. Establishing Quiet Zones can be costly for local agencies, and this policy seeks to provide boundaries for potential Quiet Zone establishment.

In conclusion, the purpose and need for a Railroad Quiet Zone Policy is to ensure cooperative and collaborative planning between local agencies, the efficient use of funds and that adequate measures are taken to maintain the health, safety and welfare of the public.

### **Railroad Quiet Zone Policy:**

It is the policy of the Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization (KMPO), and the signatories hereto signed, that Railroad Quiet Zones can be established to decrease train horn noise, in a fiscally responsible manner, and in areas where train related noise affects dense residential and commercial development.

### **The following conditions will be required prior to the establishment of a Railroad Quiet Zone in Kootenai County:**

1. The location of the Quiet Zone must be on either the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) or Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) main lines. Consideration for Quiet Zones on spur lines should be limited, due to minimal railroad use.
2. Needed improvements required for the establishment of the Quiet Zone should be funded by alternative funding mechanisms. Funding sources could include, but are not limited to, special taxing districts (i.e. Local Improvement District (LID)) or grants.

3. If an agency or group of interested parties desire to establish a Quiet Zone, but does not have authority over the road crossing(s) in question, the agency or parties may be required to provide the funding for the initial project and annual maintenance of the improvements.

4. If safety improvements are needed at crossings, at the time of implementation, all other crossing components shall be brought up to current standards.

### **Identifying Suitable Quiet Zone Locations**

KMPO will consider supporting the location for a Quiet Zone based on the following items:

- Density of residential development
- Impact of horns on commercial and residential activity
- Number of crossings included within the Zone
- Condition of crossing infrastructure
- Planned projects for proposed crossings
- Available funding for construction and annual maintenance

The preferred locations for Quiet Zones are those in areas that are developed or developing into suburban land uses and densities within one-quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) mile of the tracks.

Crossings other than those identified as Priority by KMPO (below) may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### **BNSF Crossings**

There are several locations along the BNSF track that may be desirable for a Quiet Zone. However, all crossings along the BNSF mainline in Kootenai County have been identified for grade separated treatments in the *Bridging the Valley Project*, completed by KMPO and the Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC) in 2005. Grade separations, in themselves, eliminate the train horn, permanently. If a BNSF crossing is identified by the public as the location for a desired Quiet Zone, a grade separation project is recommended by KMPO. Although KMPO member agencies are currently seeking grant funds for grade separation projects throughout this corridor, other funding mechanisms, such as a LID, may be appropriate to construct a project in the short-term if the public desires. The public can seek to create a LID through petition, and the governing agency of the crossing would act as the sponsor.

### **Priority Crossings for Quiet Zones:**

#### **Existing Mill Street Quiet Zone**

The KCATT Subcommittee on Quiet Zones has identified the existing Mill Street Quiet Zone in Rathdrum as a priority crossing. The Mill Street Quiet Zone was established in 2011. The Subcommittee supports the preservation of this Quiet Zone, due to the city of Rathdrum's investment in the crossing and the social and economic benefits that have been a result of the project.

### Proposed McGuire Road to Idaho Road

The Subcommittee identified the UPRR mainline section from McGuire Road to Idaho Road as the priority location to establish a Quiet Zone. This two-mile section encompasses seven public grade crossings and two private pedestrian crossings. This section was identified due to the current and future density of residential development along the rail line, the likelihood of lower costs for safety improvements (due to the existence of crossing gates at most of the included crossings), and the high number of crossings within the section. The subcommittee recommended that, in the future, the Quiet Zone could be expanded to include the UPRR sections from Stateline to McGuire Road and Idaho Road to Meyer Road for a total of nine miles encompassing 15 current grade crossings.