

Boulder County working to create railroad crossing quiet zones

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If You Go

What: Boulder County's Transportation Department will host a public meeting to present information and get community input about proposals to convert railroad crossings along the Colo. 119 highway corridor into quiet zones.

When: 6:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Niwot Elementary School, 8778 Morton Road, Niwot

More information: The county's railroad quiet zone project web page, including a link that people can use to submit comments, is at bit.ly/2fQ1jxg

Boulder County's Transportation Department is working to create quiet zones at a number of BNSF Railroad crossings alongside Colo. 119 between Longmont and Boulder. The county has received a \$1.4 million grant from the Denver Regional Council of Governments for the project, which would help fund safety improvements that must be made in order to get federally approved reductions in the blaring of locomotives' horns that's now required whenever trains approach crossings that haven't qualified as quiet zones.

Potential locations for the quiet-zone improvements include the BNSF crossings near the Diagonal Highway at: North 83rd Street; Niwot's Second Avenue; Niwot Road; Monarch Road; North 55th Street; Jay Road, and Independence Road.

Marc Ambrosi, the Transportation Department's manager of the quiet-zones project, said Boulder County is matching the \$1.4 million grant with about \$350,000 from its own budget.

County officials said they hope to apply the \$1.7 million total to fund as many quiet-zone improvements as possible, but that the money will likely not be enough to address all of the unincorporated Boulder County road crossings along Colo. 119.

The cost of a single quiet zone depends on the specific characteristics of the road and the crossing but commonly ranges between \$250,000 and \$500,000 per crossing, officials

said.

As it stands now, the Federal Railroad Administration requires locomotives' horns to be sounded for between 15 and 20 seconds as they approach all public roadways' rail crossings. The minimum volume level for those horns to sound is 96 decibels, and the maximum is 110 decibels.

County officials have said criteria they'll use to select crossings for quiet-zone improvements will include: safety; the numbers of people living and working near the crossing impacted by train horn noise; street characteristics; costs and feasibility of implementing the improvements, and possible public-private partnerships to pay for the work.

The county has invited people to a meeting Wednesday from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Niwot Elementary School, 8778 Morton Road, to hear information and make comments about the project.

Once Boulder County selects specific crossings for quiet-zone improvements, designs will be done in consultation with BNSF Railroad, the Colorado Department of Transportation and the Colorado Public Utilities Commission.

Quiet-zone projects can include a combination of crossing-arms improvements, curbs and medians to prevent vehicles from going around gates, improved communications circuitry between the tracks, the train and the crossing arms and, in some cases, localized, stationary "wayside" horns directed at vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians that may be approaching at the crossings.

County officials noted that Boulder, Louisville, Lafayette and Longmont also have been studying the possibility of creating quiet zones at some of the railroad crossings within their municipal boundaries.

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