

Decision 00-12-015 December 07, 2000

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Application of City of Simi Valley Public Works Department to close a private grade crossing at the tracks of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA-Metrolink)/Union Pacific Railroad Company and construct a public grade crossing in the City of Simi Valley, State of California.

Application 00-07-049  
(Filed July 27, 2000  
Supplemented September 25,  
2000)

**OPINION**

**Summary**

City of Simi Valley Public Works Department (City) requests authority to close a private grade crossing and construct "A" Street Crossing, across the railroad tracks of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA – Metrolink)/Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP), located at Parker Ranch in the City of Simi Valley, Ventura County.

**Discussion**

As part of the Parker Ranch project, City proposes to develop 195 single-family homes and 324 multi-family apartments on approximately 94.8 acres of the site. The project would help meet the City's need for affordable housing as 81 of the proposed apartments would be made affordable to low and very low income households. The remaining 162.5 acres of the site would be left as open space and dedicated to the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. Access to the site would be provided from Los Angeles Avenue through a new "A" Street, that would be extended into the site with an at-grade crossing of the Union

Pacific Railroad Company. Three emergency access routes would also be provided.

In connection therewith, City proposes to close and remove an existing at-grade private crossing south of Los Angeles Avenue across the mainline tracks. This location is approximately one mile south of State Route (SR) 118. The proposed new "A" Street at-grade crossing is needed to provide reasonable public access to the new residential area south of Los Angeles Avenue. The crossing will be the only public at-grade crossing between Los Angeles and Katherine Road, a distance of approximately 2 miles. The anticipated average annual daily traffic volume (AADT) on the proposed public crossing is 3000 and existing train traffic averages 16 passenger trains and 5 freight trains per day on the line. The SCRRA-Metrolink has indicated support and reviewed this crossing at its August board meeting.

Traffic patterns at this crossing will be enhanced through the following road configuration: A 175-foot long, 10-foot wide median on the north side of the tracks; a median 10-foot wide on the south side of the tracks for distance of approximately 40 feet, followed by an opening of approximately 43 feet (that will be striped with a double yellow center line) to permit ingress and egress from the residences south of the tracks and west of the street, followed by a 2-foot wide median, which widens to an approximately 10-foot wide median and ends approximately 260 feet south of the tracks. A pavement arrow in the southbound lane at the north side of the driveway along with a standard "wrong way" sign.

City plans to enhance public safety at highway-railroad crossings through implementation of innovative technology. The automatic crossing protection will be supplemented by two wayside horns and an in-pavement flashing light-emitting diode (LED) light system in the approach roadways, all of which will

activate with the crossing signals; along with the standard advanced warning signs, pavement marking and striping.

*The Wayside Horn System:*

The Wayside Horn System, also known as Automated Horn System (AHS) is to be installed on a trial and experimental basis to evaluate the effectiveness of the devices in providing warnings to pedestrian and vehicular traffic of the approach trains. AHS is automatically activated by the approach of a train by means of the same circuitry which activates the flashing lights and gates at the crossing. AHS is installed at both roadway approaches to the crossing and directed at the roadway traffic.

The purpose of the proposed system is to replace the train-mounted horn by AHS to provide warning to the roadway traffic near the railroad-highway at-grade crossing of the approach of a train. Railroad operating rules and Section 7604 of the California Public Utilities Code require locomotive engineers to sound the train horn as the train approaches a railroad-highway at-grade crossing. Locomotive engineers begin sounding the horn approximately one-quarter mile from the at-grade crossing. The crossing warning also exposes residents living near the at-grade crossing to the sound of the train horn, creating annoyance to the local community.

Currently, there are no Federal regulations that require locomotive engineers to sound the train horn. The daily exposure to train horns, for residents living near at-grade crossings, interferes with their enjoyment of life. Many local communities desire to reduce the annoying effects of the train-mounted horn. Some of the communities, including City of Ames, Iowa; City of Parson, Kansas; and City of Gering, Nebraska, have recently installed AHS at

their at-grade crossing and are satisfied with the reduction of train horn noise without any apparent effect on grade crossing safety.

*The In-Pavement Flashing LED Lighting System:*

City proposes to install an array of three unidirectional red light emitting diode (LED) heads across every lane at the grade crossing; 18 inches outside of the limit line spanning the entire roadway width; all focused on the approaching lanes of traffic, and emitting a steady and/or flashing red light when activated in conjunction with and as a supplemental enhancement to the other installed warning devices.

In 1993, the City of Santa Rosa, California introduced a new concept in proactive pedestrian warning system known as the In-Pavement Flashing Lights Crosswalk Warning System, in response to an unusually high incidence of pedestrian-vehicle collisions. The In-Pavement Flashing Light Warning System consists of a series of flashing light units, which are installed just below the pavement surface. The system was designed to warn drivers of the presence of pedestrians about to cross or in the crosswalk at uncontrolled intersections. In 1994-95, the system was installed at three locations in Santa Rosa, and between 1996 and 1997, at five other cities in California. Evaluations of the In-Pavement Flashing Lights Crosswalk Warning System produced favorable results. Most recently, the community of Kirkland, Washington commissioned an independent agency to evaluate the in-pavement flashing lights system. This report was prepared for the Transportation Research Board and the Institute of Traffic Engineers. The report concluded that the “flashing crosswalks are considered a success in terms of their effectiveness in causing motorists to respond to pedestrians and in terms of their public support.” Participating parties propose to test the operational and cost effectiveness of applying similar in-pavement

flashing lights system at highway-railroad crossings to warn motorists of an approaching train.

Because these technologies—AHS and the in-pavement flashing red LED light system—are fairly new and innovative, an evaluation will be conducted by the involved entities, including the City after the installation, to assess the effectiveness of the system. The objective of the experiment is to determine any change in behavior among motorist approaching and passing through the crossing, when the test devices are operation, and the cost-benefit of utilizing such devices at rail/highway grade crossing.

City agreed to participate in the evaluation of the experimental devices with reports made at 30 days, 6 months, and one-year intervals after installation. The evaluation would be a joint review, involving UP, SCRRA – Metrolink, and the Ventura County Transportation Commission.

City is the lead agency for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), as amended, Public Resources (PR) Code Sections 21000, et seq. City has prepared an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Parker Ranch Project. After preparation and review of the EIR, City approved the project. On June 28, 2000, City filed a Notice of Determination with the Ventura County Clerk, which found that “The approved project will have a significant effect on the environment.”

Mitigation measures will reduce adverse impact to acceptable levels. None of the adverse impacts can be attributed to the grade crossing. A Statement of Overriding Considerations was adopted for the project.

The Commission is a responsible agency for this project under CEQA and has reviewed and considered the lead agency's EIR, Notice of Determination, and Statement of Overriding Considerations. The site of the project has been inspected by the Commission's Rail Safety and Carriers Division — Rail

Crossings Engineering Section staff. Staff examined the need for and the safety of the proposed grade crossing and related railroad construction and recommends that the application be approved.

On August 31, 2000, Commission staff filed a timely protest and request for hearing. Commission staff stated that the various participating parties—SCRRA-Metrolink, City, UP, and Commission staff—needed additional time, in which to discuss and explore various alternatives to enhance safety of the proposed railroad crossing at Parker Ranch.

The various parties have now reached a mutually satisfactory solution. As a result, City has filed a Supplement to Application A.00-07-049, which incorporates many of the Commission staff suggestions with respect to the crossing roadway medians, unidirectional red light-emitting diode (LED) heads across every lane, and Automated Horn System (AHS), which is to be installed on the railroad right-of-way on a trial experimental basis to evaluate the effectiveness of the warning devices.

The Supplement recognizes that AHS and the in-pavement flashing red LED light system are experimental, and add a newly required extended median on both sides of the track. In addition, City agreed to participate in the evaluation of the experimental devices, with reports made at 30 days, 6 months, and one year after installation. The evaluation would be a joint review, involving UP, SCRRA-Metrolink, and the Ventura County Transportation Commission.

On October 4, 2000, Commission staff filed a Motion to Withdraw Protest, stating that subsequent meetings of representatives of the City, developer of the housing project, Metrolink Public Works, and Commission staff were held in the PUC offices in Los Angeles on September 11, 2000 and September 20, 2000. All

interested parties had conferred and explored various alternatives to enhance the safety of the proposed mainline railroad crossing at Parker Ranch.

The application is in compliance with the Commission's filing requirements, including Rule 38 of the Rules of Practice and Procedure, which relates to the construction of a public road, highway, or street across a railroad. A site map of the grade crossing is shown on plans attached to the application as Appendix A.

In Resolution ALJ 176-3044, dated August 3, 2000 and published in the Commission Daily Calendar on August 4, 2000, the Commission preliminarily categorized this application as ratesetting, and preliminarily determined that hearings were not necessary. Since no hearings were held, this preliminary determination remains accurate. The Commission's Rail Safety and Carriers Division recommends that this application be granted. Given these developments, public hearing is not necessary, and it is not necessary to disturb the preliminary determinations made in Resolution ALJ 176-3044.

This is an uncontested matter in which the decision grants the relief requested. Accordingly, pursuant to Public Utilities Code Section 311 (g) (2), the otherwise applicable 30-day period for public review and comment is being waived.

### **Findings of Fact**

1. Notice of the application was published in the Commission Daily Calendar on August 3, 2000.
2. Commission staff filed a timely protest and request for hearing on August 31, 2000.

3. Commission staff withdrew its protest and request for hearing on October 4, 2000. All parties are now in agreement. Therefore, a public hearing is not necessary.

4. City requests authority, under Public Utilities Code Sections 1201-1205, to construct "A" Street, across the tracks of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA – Metrolink)/Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP), located at Parker Ranch in the City of Simi Valley, Ventura County.

5. City also requests authority to install the AHS and the in-pavement red flashing LED light system at the "A" Street Crossing on a one-year trial experimental basis.

6. "A" Street will serve public need by providing a safe access route across railroad tracks in the proposed Parker Ranch.

7. Public convenience and necessity require the construction of the "A" Street Grade Crossing.

8. Public safety requires that the crossing be protected by two Standard No. 9 flashing light signals with gates, (General Order (GO) 75-C) – one north of the tracks (northwest corner) and one on the south side (southeast corner).

9. Public safety also requires that the usual protections, standard advanced warning signs, pavement marking and striping, supplemented by two wayside horns and an in-pavement flashing LED light system in the approach roadways, all of which will activate with the crossing signals.

10. An approaching train activating the flashers and gates will also activate the AHS, which will be programmed to sound the customary grade crossing pattern horn until the train enters the crossing.

11. Two AHS activation strobe lights shall be installed along the railroad tracks on each side—one at a distance of one-quarter mile and the second strobe

light at one-half mile—in advance of the crossing to provide status of the AHS operation during inclement weather conditions.

12. The locomotive engineer will be instructed to cease sounding the train-mounted horn on approach to the “A” Street crossing, unless, at his or her discretion, the locomotive engineer believes that it is necessary to sound the train-mounted horn to provide additional warning.

13. If the AHS is not functioning properly as indicated by the advance strobe lights, the locomotive engineer will sound the train-mounted horn.

14. Even if the AHS is functioning properly, the locomotive engineer may also sound the train-mounted horn to provide additional warning when necessary, at his or her discretion.

15. A training program to educate all locomotive engineers operating on this track as to the operation of the AHS, and accordingly revise its operating rules for this track.

16. An approaching train activating the flashers and gates will also activate the in-pavement red flashing LED light system. This will create a psychological barrier of illuminated steady and/or flashing red LED lights, across every lane at the grade crossing, 18 inches outside of the limit line spanning the entire roadway width, all focused on the approaching lanes of traffic.

17. Evaluation of the in-pavement LED light system would be based on observed measurable data such as : (1) Approach speed of motorist; (2) Field of vision examination by the motorist (looking in either direction); (3) Braking and stopping activity (or lack thereof); (4) Interviews with motorists after passing through the crossing; (5) Interviews with train engineers and other railroad personnel; (6) Time, date, and weather conditions during data collection, and how they affect the site; and (7) Nature of existing warning devices at the site.

18. City shall provide an evaluation of the experimental devices with reports made at 30 days, 6 months, and one-year interval after installation.

19. City is the lead agency for this project under CEQA, as amended.

20. The Commission is a responsible agency for this project and has reviewed and considered the lead agency's EIR, Notice of Determination, and Statement of Overriding Considerations.

### **Conclusions of Law**

1. There are no unresolved matters or protests; a public hearing is not necessary.

2. This order should be effective immediately as City wishes to commence construction of the project at the earliest possible date, to meet Federal and State funding schedules.

3. The application should be granted as set forth in the following order.

## **O R D E R**

### **IT IS ORDERED** that:

1. City of Simi Valley Public Works Department (City) is authorized to close a private grade crossing at Milepost 438.2 (101VE), and construct "A" Street Crossing, across the railroad tracks of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA – Metrolink)/Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP), located at Parker Ranch in the City of Simi Valley, Ventura County, at the location and substantially as shown by the plans attached to the application and Appendix A of this order, to be identified as Crossing 101VE – 438.27.

2. Clearances shall be in accordance with General Order (GO) 26-D. Walkways shall conform to GO 118.

3. Protection at the crossing shall be two Standard No. 9 flashing light signals with gates (GO 75-C).

4. The Automated Horn System (AHS) and in-pavement red flashing light-emitting diode (LED) light system are authorized on a trial and experimental basis for one year to evaluate the effectiveness of the devices, in providing warning to pedestrian and vehicular traffic of the approach of a train at an at-grade crossing.

5. An approaching train activating the flashers and gates shall also activate the AHS, which shall be programmed to sound the customary grade crossing pattern horn until the train enters the crossing.

6. Two AHS activation strobe lights shall be installed along the railroad tracks on each side—one at a distance of one-quarter mile, and the second strobe light at one-half mile—in advance of the crossings to provide status of the AHS operation during inclement weather conditions.

7. Locomotive engineers will be instructed to cease sounding the train-mounted horn on approach to the “A” Street Crossing, except when, at their discretion, a locomotive engineer believes that it is necessary to sound the train-mounted horn to provide additional warning.

8. If the AHS is not functioning properly, as indicated by the advance strobe lights, the locomotive engineer shall sound the train-mounted horn, and may also sound the horn to provide additional warning when necessary.

9. A training program shall be implemented to educate all locomotive engineers operating on this track as to the operation of the AHS, and accordingly revise its operating rules for this track.

10. The response of locomotive engineers to the proper functioning of the strobe lights should be periodically checked randomly by turning off the strobe lights.

11. An approaching train activating the flashers and gates will also activate the in-pavement red flashing LED light system. This will create a psychological barrier of illuminated steady and/or flashing red LED lights, across every lane at the grade crossing, 18 inches outside of the limit line spanning the entire roadway width, all focused on the approaching lanes of traffic.

12. Evaluation of the in-pavement LED light system would be based on observed measurable data such as : (1) Approach speed of motorist; (2) Field of vision examination by the motorist (looking in either direction); (3) Braking and stopping activity (or lack thereof); (4) Interviews with motorists after passing through the crossing; (5) Interviews with train engineers and other railroad personnel; (6) Time, date, and weather conditions during data collection, and how they affect the site; and (7) Nature of existing warning devices at the site.

13. City shall provide an evaluation of the experimental devices with reports made at 30 days, 6 months, and one-year interval after installation.

14. Construction of the grade crossing shall be equal to or superior to Standard No. 8 concrete slabs of GO 72-B. Maintenance of the crossing shall be in accordance with the provisions of GO 72-B.

15. Construction and maintenance costs shall be borne by applicant in accordance with Section 1202.2 of the Public Utilities Code.

16. Within 30 days after completion of the work under this order, City shall notify the Commission in writing that the authorized work was completed.

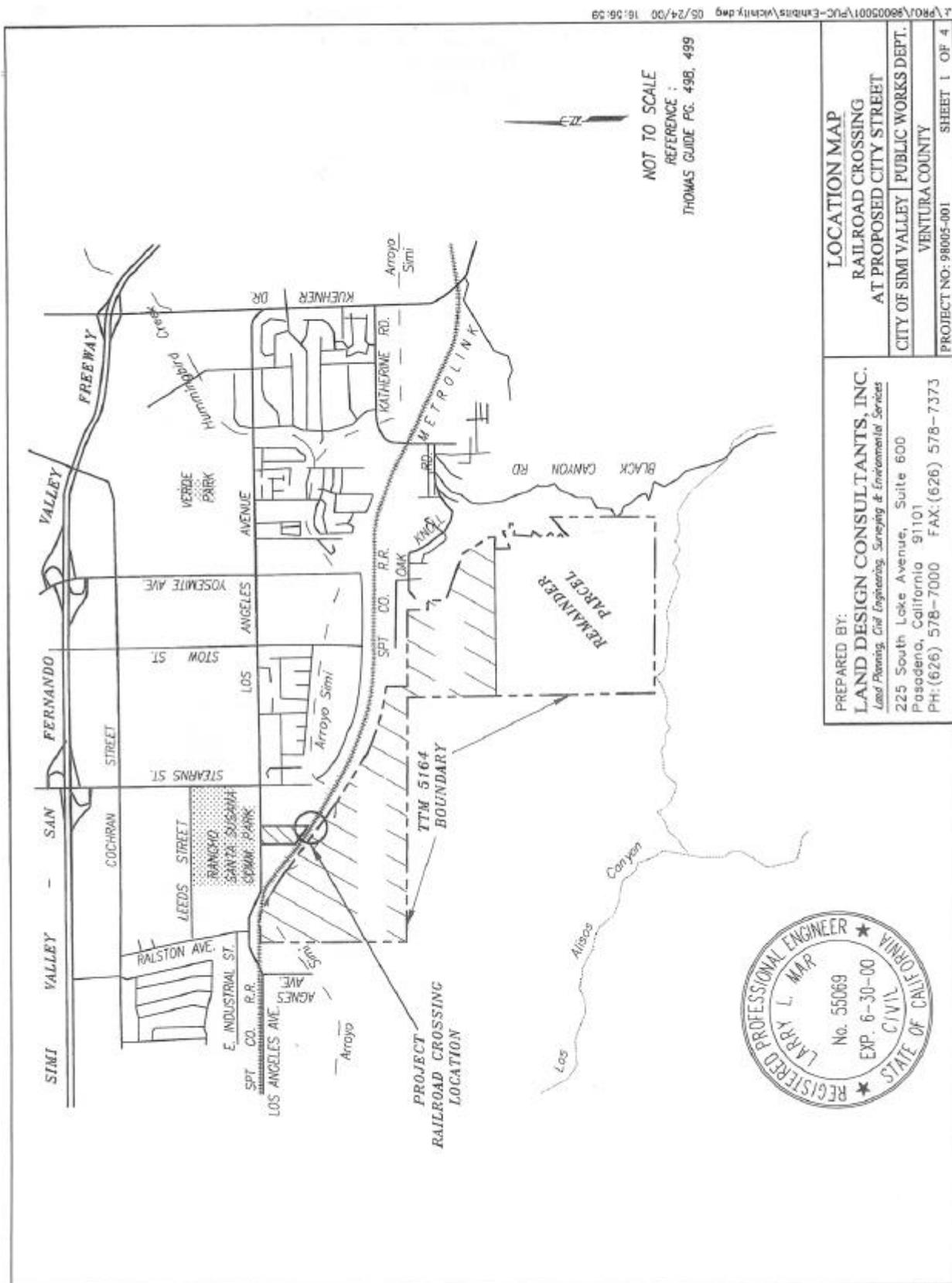
17. This authorization shall expire if not exercised within two years unless time is extended or if the above conditions are not complied with. Authorization may be revoked or modified if public convenience, necessity, or safety so require. The application is granted as set forth above.

Application 00-07-049 is closed.

This order is effective today.

Dated December 07, 2000, at San Francisco, California.

LORETTA M. LYNCH  
President  
HENRY M. DUQUE  
JOSIAH L. NEEPER  
RICHARD A. BILAS  
CARL W. WOOD  
Commissioners



J:\PROJ\98005001\PLC-Embiris\city.dwg 05/24/00 16:56:59

NOT TO SCALE  
REFERENCE :  
THOMAS GUIDE PG. 498, 499

**LOCATION MAP**  
RAILROAD CROSSING  
AT PROPOSED CITY STREET  
CITY OF SIMI VALLEY | PUBLIC WORKS DEPT.  
VENTURA COUNTY  
PROJECT NO: 98005-001 SHEET 1 OF 4

PREPARED BY:  
**LAND DESIGN CONSULTANTS, INC.**  
*Land Planning, Civil Engineering, Surveying & Environmental Services*  
225 South Lake Avenue, Suite 600  
Pasadena, California 91101  
PH: (626) 578-7000 FAX: (626) 578-7373



