

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Rail Safety and Carriers Division
Rail Engineering Safety Branch
Rail Crossings Engineering
Section

RESOLUTION SX-38
Date: April 19, 2001

RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION SX-38 PURSUANT TO SECTION 12.1 OF GENERAL ORDER 75-C AUTHORIZING SANTA CLARA VALLEY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY (VTA) TO DEVIATE FROM THE PROVISIONS OF SECTION 6.7 OF GENERAL ORDER 75-C BY MODIFYING THE DURATION OF THE AUDIBLE COMPONENT OF THE GRADE CROSSING WARNING DEVICES AT THE WHISMAN ROAD GRADE CROSSING OF THE TASMAN WEST LIGHT RAIL LINE IN THE CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW, SANTA CLARA COUNTY.

SUMMARY

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), by letter dated October 5, 2000, has requested authority pursuant to Section 12.1 of Commission General Order (GO) 75-C, to modify the operation of the automatic crossing warning device bells. VTA requests authority, on a trial basis, to turn off the crossing warning device bells after the gate arms reach a horizontal position. The associated warning lights will continue to function throughout the entire warning operating cycle.

This resolution authorizes the requested modification for a 180-day trial period subject to the criteria explained in the body of this resolution.

BACKGROUND

The Whisman Road grade crossing of the Tasman West light rail line is located in the immediate vicinity of the Whisman Station residential neighborhood. The closest dwellings are located within 75 feet of the two-lane grade crossing. VTA operates 24 hours per day, seven days per week, light rail vehicle (LRV) service over the light rail line, with LRVs operating on ten-minute headways between the hours of six a.m. and seven p.m. During these hours there is a LRV movement over this crossing approximately every five minutes.

The residents of the three Whisman Station community groups have complained about the noise emanating from the automatic crossing warning device bells. The resident groups are requesting the reduction of noise levels from the crossing warning devices.

DISCUSSION

The modification of the automatic crossing warning devices would allow for the bells to sound when triggered by the approaching LRV, while the gate arm is moving from the vertical to the horizontal position. The bells would then stop sounding once the gate arm reaches the down (horizontal) position. At this point, the absence of an audible alert from the crossing warning devices will be supplemented by the sounding of the LRV's onboard mechanical low bell. The LRV will continue to sound its bell until it reaches the far side of the grade crossing.

VTA has provided information indicating that there is a very low vehicular traffic volume at the Whisman Drive crossing, and a pedestrian traffic count of 125 in a 12-hour period from 0600 to 1800 hours.

VTA will incorporate, among other things, the following safety measures:

1. VTA has modified Light Rail Operations Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) #3.5. A new wayside "bell" sign will be posted along the Right of Way in advance of the crossing. This modified SOP instructs Operators to commence the sounding of the LRV's mechanical low bell when the train reaches the sign, and continue until reaching the far side of the grade crossing.

2. VTA LRVs operate over this crossing at low speeds of approximately 15 miles per hour.
3. The crossing warning devices operate for a minimum of 20 seconds prior to the LRV reaching the crossing, and the gate arms are in the fully down (horizontal) position well before the LRV arrives at the crossing.
4. VTA has videotaped the grade crossing to establish Baseline conditions at the crossing before implementation of the modification to the crossing warning devices. VTA will repeat the videotaping of the grade crossing approximately 90 days after the modifications to the crossing warning devices are made. This will aid in monitoring the crossing for any adverse pedestrian impacts.
5. VTA has conducted Neighborhood Safety classes in the Whisman community providing residents with information explaining the changes in the way the crossing gates perform as a result of the proposed modifications to the crossing warning devices.
6. VTA and Commission staff will conduct periodic field monitoring of the grade crossing to observe and analyze any adverse effects on safety and pedestrian traffic.

Upon review of factual material submitted by VTA, as well as an on-site inspection of the Whisman Drive grade crossing by all participating parties, Commission staff is in agreement with VTA's proposal to proceed with a 180-day trial period. The operation and safety of the crossing will be evaluated during this trial period after which, VTA will prepare a Crossing Warning Device Modification Results report documenting the performance of the grade crossing warning devices during the 180-day trial period.

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

FINDINGS

1. VTA requests authority, on a 180 day trial basis, to turn off the crossing warning device bells after the gate arms reach a horizontal position, at the Whisman Road crossing (CPUC #84B-12.90) in the City of Mountain View, Santa Clara County.
2. VTA has modified its Light Rail Operations Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) #3.5 to instruct its Operators to commence sounding of the LRV's onboard bell during its approach, and continue until reaching the far side of the crossing.
3. VTA has conducted Neighborhood Safety classes in the Whisman community providing residents with information explaining the changes in the way the crossing gates will perform as a result of the proposed modifications to the crossing warning devices.
4. VTA will operate the modified crossing warning devices for a 180 day trial period, after which, a report will be prepared outlining the results thereof.
5. Commission staff has reviewed VTA's proposal and finds that the request is a safe and reasonable alternative and has merit.
6. Staff recommends that this resolution be adopted.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED THAT:

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) be granted authority to modify, on a trial basis, the crossing warning device bells to sound, once activated, until the gate arms reach the down (horizontal) position at the Whisman Road crossing 84B-12.90 in the City of Mountain View, Santa Clara County.

The following requirements shall apply to the Whisman Road modification of the automatic crossing warning devices:

1. VTA shall install a new wayside "bell" sign along the Right of Way in advance of the crossing. VTA shall modify its Light Rail Operations Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) #3.5. This modified SOP shall instruct its

Operators to commence the sounding of the LRV's onboard warning device when it reaches the sign, and continue until reaching the far side of the grade crossing.

2. The automatic crossing warning devices shall continue to operate for a minimum of 20 seconds prior to the LRV reaching the crossing, and gate arms must be in the fully down (horizontal) position prior to the LRV's arrival at the crossing.
3. VTA shall notify the County of Santa Clara and the Commission's Rail Crossings Engineering Staff when the modifications to the Whisman Road automatic grade crossing warning devices will be completed and operational.
4. VTA shall prepare a Crossing Warning Device Modification Results report within 30 days of the conclusion of the actual 180-day trial period.

This resolution is effective today.

I certify that the foregoing resolution was duly introduced, passed, and adopted by the Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on April 19, 2001. The following Commissioners voted favorably thereon:

WESLEY M. FRANKLIN
Executive Director

LORETTA M. LYNCH
President
RICHARD A. BILAS
CARL W. WOOD
GEOFFREY F. BROWN
Commissioners

Commissioner Henry M Duque being
necessarily absent did not participate