

# **CLINTONVILLE AREA COMMISSION TRAIN TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT**

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## **I. Background Information on Train Task Force:**

Train traffic has increased significantly in Ohio due to the acquisition of Conrail tracks by CSX and Norfolk Southern railroads. The impact of this railway merger has caused growing concerns among residents who live near the affected railroad tracks because the quality of life in these neighborhoods has been degraded. A recent report from the United States government shows that increased train traffic can cause railways to expand which in turn increases the likelihood of derailments and impacts the safety and quality of neighborhoods.

The Clintonville Area Commission formed the Train Task Force ("TTF") in October, 1999 to address growing community concerns regarding the quality and safety of central Ohio neighborhoods.

This report is a summation of the TTF's efforts to define the problems and offer possible solutions as to how central Ohio residents may better cope with the significant change in railroad activity. While the members of the TTF are supportive of railroads as legitimate means of travel and commerce, we believe that CSX and Norfolk Southern are, in part, responsible for protecting the integrity of the neighborhoods through which they travel.

The general residential complaints and concerns are set forth below:

- **Noise:** Excessive horn blasting before, at and after crossings. The FRA has established that train horns should be sounded as a train is entering a crossing area by blowing ;
- **Safety:** Trains that block or move slowly through crossings decreases emergency vehicle response time and also gives rise to automobile drivers becoming impatient and taking shortcuts through residential streets;
- **Quality of Life:** The railroad tracks, which are located very close to residential homes, are being used as makeshift shipping yards where the trains idle for extremely long periods of time, blocking the view to the other side of the tracks and creating excessive diesel smoke;

- **Environmental:** Increased transportation of hazardous materials through residential neighborhoods causes fear of catastrophic accidents.

Members of the TTF have learned that these problems are not limited to the boundaries of Clintonville. Other Ohio neighborhoods are experiencing similar, and often times, more severe problems. In an effort to assist other communities, the TTF has gathered information from Worthington, Fostoria, Greenwich, Berea and Holmstead Falls.

In addition to collecting data on residents' concerns, the TTF has conducted two (2) large community forums, met with representatives of CSX and Norfolk Southern, met with city, state and federal offices, testified before the Ohio House of Representatives and conducted extensive research on federal regulations that govern railroad activity. The preliminary support from City Council member Maryellen O'Shaughnessey and the research and involvement by the TTF has influenced the introduction of legislation by State Representative Dave Robinson. State Representative Robinson's bill proposes the installation of automated horns at railroad crossings that would provide safe, consistent, federally regulated whistles (unlike that which is now in place and controlled by the individual train engineers).

Clearly, safety of the community should be the primary concern when seeking solutions to this problem. For example, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) reported that, "In 1998, there were, 3508 highway-rail grade crossing collisions resulting in 431 fatalities and 1,303 injuries. Studies have shown that there is a 62% greater probability that highway-rail grade crossing incidents will occur at crossings where train horns are not sounded." This begs the conclusion that eliminating train horns or even attempting to curtail the use of horns could put our community at risk. The TTF is committed to supporting only initiatives that do not advance risk to our community. Additionally, in 1994 the United States Congress passed a law requiring train horns be sounded when a train approaches and enters a public highway-rail grade crossing unless certain exceptions are met to establish a quiet zone. (Criteria for quiet zones are explained in detail in the Recommendations section.)

## **II. Community Concern:**

Increased train traffic has adversely affected the quality of life of some residents in our area. As a part of the TTF, residents were asked to monitor incidents that occurred. Detailed events were recorded and reported to CSX and Norfolk Southern as well as the Clintonville Area Commission and select community leaders. This information is not comprehensive representing only a specific timeframe. The incidents recorded below do, however, represent the continuous problems associated with this increased train traffic.

**Increased train traffic on three (3) railroad tracks west of I-71 at Weber Road crossing as reported by Melrose Avenue residents:**



- **August 7 (Saturday) 6-8 AM.** Two (2) trains sat with engines idling on the west and middle tracks, 40-100 yards north of the Weber Road crossing. Six (6) other trains sat for one (1) hour or more throughout the day and approximately 20 trains moved on the tracks during the day.
- Diesel fuel exhaust fumes from these trains are often so bad that it is unfit to sit outside.
- The area 1½ blocks north of this crossing appears to be used for crew shift changes as vehicles are seen transporting people into and out of the areas between the middle and west tracks. The trains are parked (engines running) waiting to complete the crew changes.
- **August 23 (Monday) 10:45 PM - 11:45 PM.** Approximately seven (7) trains went through the crossing, all blowing their horns for long blasts into and beyond the Weber Road crossing.
- **August 26 (Thursday) Morning.** Train #8769 Norfolk Southern ("NS"), south bound, sat for 45 minutes in line with Melrose Avenue while people were getting out of a van and into the train.
- **August 30 (Monday) 6:50 PM.** Train #5919 on the middle track blew its horn while in the Weber Road crossing and beyond.
- **August 30 (Monday) 7:50 PM.** Train #5285 on the middle track was traveling at 5 MPH.
- Slow moving trains and trains just starting up after being idle are provoking drivers of automobiles (traveling east on Weber Road) to turn north into the alley and speed west on Melrose to avoid the long wait at the crossing. This is dangerous for neighborhood children playing in the area.
- **September 3 (Friday) 8:30 AM.** NS middle track north last time as train was even with gate and going ~5 MPH.
- **September 3 (Friday) 8:55 AM.** NS middle track north still blowing horn when even with Melrose Avenue.
- **September 3 (Friday) 8:30** Milepost train's van sitting between middle and west track.
- **September 3 (Friday) 9:15** Train #9364 Conrail on west track north moving slowly continued blowing horn through crossing gate.

- September 3 (Friday) 1:15 PM. On west track, train #6524 Conrail, south bound, sat parked in line with Melrose Avenue and later started up again.
- September 4 (Saturday) 8:40 AM. Trains #912 and #945 Santa Fe south bound, stopped yards away from Weber Road for 5 minutes to load two people from a white transport van. It then took ~10 minutes to move past crossing (slow). Then #3607 Conrail on middle track sat from 8:50-9:15 in line with Melrose alley.
- September 4 (Saturday) 9:00 AM. Train #9045 NS slow moving (coal train) north was moving a couple MPH causing the Weber Road traffic to turn down Melrose for 10-15 minutes.
- September 4 (Saturday) 6:00 PM. Train #8244 started blowing whistle for a long time.
- September 5 (Sunday) 10:15 PM until after 11:00 PM. Trains #715 and 4120 just sitting on tracks and running engines. Diesel fuel smell almost unbearable.
- September 6 (Monday) 12:00 PM. Train #6649 kept blowing whistle even after he was through crossing at Weber.
- September 6 (Monday) 9:30 AM. Milepost vehicle waiting between middle and west tracks.
- September 7 (Tuesday) 1:30 PM – 2:15 PM. Train #3029. Conrail southbound middle track with 3 engines sat on track at Melrose.
- Sept. 7, 5:40 PM. Train #3031 sat idle for 45 minutes in middle track.
- Sept. 9, 7:45PM. Train #5440 Conrail southbound sitting idle in middle track in line with Milford Avenue. Train extended only a few blocks from Milford to EN Broadway.
- Sept.12, (Sunday) 10:10AM-10:15. Train #8330 Conrail with 2 engines in middle track sitting idle in line with Melrose.
- Sept. 15, 7:30PM. Train #7130 NS southbound blew horn through the Weber Road gates
- Sept.17, 2:00 PM. Train #7830 CSX sat idling in line with the south side of Melrose.
- Sept.17, 5:45PM. Train #9063 NS middle track took off after Milepost transportation van delivered person.



- Sept.20, 5:00 PM. East track south of Weber Conrail #6789 northbound was sitting stopped and let off 3 engineers and the train then started moving again ~5:05.
- Sept. 23, 6:25AM-7:25AM or later. Middle track train southbound (too dark to see number) sitting idle in line with Melrose alley.
- Sept. 26 (Sunday) 7:30-7:50. #6751 Conrail middle track southbound sitting idle in line with Melrose Street.
- Sept. 26 (Sunday). #3045 Conrail middle track southbound (8:25-9:08) sat idle as transport vehicle came and sat between tracks in line with Melrose Street.
- Sept. 26 (Sunday). #3016 Conrail middle track southbound (9:35) sat idle in line with Melrose Street.

### **III. Information from Other Ohio Communities:**

Members of the TTF spoke with community leaders from Worthington, Fostoria, and Greenwich who were experiencing similar and sometimes more severe problems with the increased train traffic. Following is a list of ways these communities approached solving their residents concerns:

- Automated horns at crossings to eliminate excessive noise
- Planted trees along tracks in residential areas to buffer noise
- Increased police patrol of crossings citing engineers whose trains blocked crossings
- Met with representatives from Norfolk Southern and CSX
- Employed four quadrant gates at crossings to increase safety
- Exploring federal grants and city funds to construct grade separations (building up grade and placing a bridge across road eliminating railroad crossing).

### **IV. Definition of Problem:**

Clearly the issue of increased train traffic has caused great concern to communities directly affected. The TTF has attempted to define the problems in a way that will empower communities to use all available resources to resolve their concerns. Because the bulk of regulation of this industry lies with the federal government it is important to define the problem in a manner that best fits this body. For this reason the TTF defines the problem into three broad categories of safety, environmental and noise. These are outlined below:

**A. Safety:**

- The safety of the traveling public is a major concern. Although there is a percentage of the population that is willing to challenge a railroad train at a grade crossing. Gates are provided, and the trains blow for a crossing.
- The hauling of highly hazardous materials has noticeably increased as well as the parking of these trains for long periods in a residential district.

**B. Environment:**

- Coal dust from consolidated coal trains, blowing off the cars and contributing to air pollution.
- Hazardous chemicals carried through or on trains parked for long periods in residential areas.
- Diesel fumes from idling engines for long periods, with soot from engines – both contributing to air pollution with the soot coating nearby buildings.

**C. Noise:**

- The extensive blowing of locomotive horns at all hours of the day and particularly at night.

**Additional Issues:**

1. The federal government has preempted control of railroads due to the interstate clause in the U.S. Constitution.
2. It is apparently difficult for the railroads to enforce the regulation on the amount of whistles required at a grade crossing.

**V. Recommendations:**

The TTF discovered a variety of ways to improve railroad crossings to limit excessive noise and increase safety. The TTF reviewed these and provided a brief summary of each below:

- **Automated Horns:** There is a system whereby a horn is located at the crossing and automatically blows for approaching trains.
- **Quiet zones.** Under a proposed rule for establishing quiet zones from the U.S. Department of Transportation these can only be established if a community adopts or installs a set of approved Supplementary Safety Measures (SSM) or a combination of



SSM and Alternative Safety Measures ASM). The SSM and ASM must be present at every crossing in the quiet zone that would desire the absence of an audible warning from oncoming trains. The community must be willing to adhere to these requirements and obtain approval from railroad companies that use the affected tracks in order to employ quiet zones. Approved SSM include:

- **Four quadrant gates**
- **Medians or channelization devices at gated crossings**
- **Paired one way streets**
- **Temporary closure (i.e. nighttime closure)**
- **Use of photo-enforcement technology**

Approved ASM include:

- **Variations of SSM**
- **Long term, programmatic law enforcement efforts and initiatives**
- **Targeted public education awareness efforts and initiatives**

In addition quiet zones must be at least one half mile in length, no automated horns and all crossings must have a minimum of gates and lights.

- **Construct passing tracks:** Encourage the railroads to build more passing tracks so that trains with hazardous materials will not be parked in residential areas.
- **Grade Separations** (Build underpasses). As noted above, cost is a major factor. This must be balanced against the gains received by the public and the reduced chance of accidents, which is of benefit both to the public and the railroads. The cost of grade separations are estimated at \$10 to \$20 million each and city funds are usually required. In residential areas these often adversely affect adjacent homes and/or businesses.

The TTF suggests that quiet zones be considered for the three railroad crossings in the Clintonville area. These crossings are located at Lincoln and Indianola, Cooke Road, and Weber Road. It is also suggested that the Cooke Road crossing be closed if possible. Currently, a storage business is the only thing located on the other side of the crossing (crossing is located just East of Indianola Avenue) and if an alternative entrance to this business is possible from the East side it should be created. The benefits to closing this crossing would be to eliminate horn blowing at one neighborhood location and provide a better location for trains to idle. The tracks leading from this crossing site are in a business/industry section of Clintonville. Currently, Norfolk Southern and CSX allow their trains to idle in a residential area of our neighborhood. The Cooke Road crossing makes it impossible to have a long enough stretch of tracks to accommodate stopping trains – closing this site reverse this problem.

The TTF highly recommends that passing tracks be installed that would require trains carrying hazardous materials to travel around the city rather than through it. Members of the TTF believe that the current tracks are in poor condition and have seen no attempts by the railroads to improve this problem. Re-routing the transportation of hazardous train cargo would mirror our current city practice governing trucks carrying dangerous materials to use I-270 rather than routes through the city.

The railroads should not be permitted to create "makeshift shipping yards" in residential areas, as has occurred in Clintonville. The community understands the railroads need to have idling trains on occasion, however, shift changes, and long term idling needs should occur in designated shipping yards. It is recommended that the city explore current laws, legislation and regulations to see if standards have been set for this issue.

Finally, the TTF recommends that the Mayor's Office set up a task force to address this growing problem and seek funding for viable solutions. In addition, the city of Louisville, Kentucky established the country's first quiet zones by negotiating with CSX Railroad and federal and state officials. The city of Columbus should contact Louisville officials to gain information on this solution.