Hot Topics
in Menlo Park

Quiet Zone Overview

JeffSchmidt
for D3 City Council

Community

Climate

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Hot Topics in Menlo Park

Hot Topics in Menlo Park is a series of short presentations that summarize key issues in our community. The goal is to help you gain an increased awareness and understanding of the topics that affect you and your family.

This year, I've been diving deep into everything happening in our city. And I've been knocking on doors and listening to what's on the minds of our neighbors in District 3.

I realized that a tool like this helps fill a gap. Each topic pulls from publicly available documents, some of them with hundreds of pages. But each presentation is short and designed to fit busy schedules.

My hope is that **Hot Topics** gives you a working knowledge of what's happening across the city and helps you stay informed and engaged.

Source: https://www.caltrain.com/projects/electrification/gallery/electrification-photo-gallery

The growing train noise problem in Menlo Park

- Train noise from extremely loud horns is causing constant noise pollution for Menlo Park
- Noise levels are a minimum of 96 decibels and a maximum of 110 decibels… similar to the worst sources of urban noise pollution
- Approximately 72 passenger and freight trains pass Menlo Park's four crossings every day. They are all within 6/10th of a mile and start at 5:15am and end at 1:00am. That's 288 crossings, with 3-4 horn blasts per crossing
- Electrification is expected to more than double the number of trains each week
- Horns impact health across the entire city: Physical (racing pulse, high blood pressure, headaches), psychological (attacks of stress, fatigue, depression, and anxiety), sleep (noise above 45db prevents sleep), and memory / concentration (ability to focus, lower performance, hard to study)

Dog 60-80dB

Car horn 90dB

Bus 100dB

Nightlife 100dB

Caltrain 96-110dB

Construction 110dB

Aircraft 130dB

Source: https://www.iberdrola.com/sustainability/what-is-noise-pollution-causes-effects-solutions. Caltrain stats are from public comments to city council from resident Steve Walter. Caltrain Menlo Park photo from corvidsketcher.com

A quiet zone is the solution

- Train engineers have discretion to use the horn for any safety situation
- A quiet zone reduces noise impact and meets federal requirements for safety
- All trains must comply with the quiet zone, including late night freight trains
- A quiet zone makes crossing improvements using a variety of supplementary safety measures – crossing closures, four quadrant gate systems, gates with channelization devices, and gates with medians
- In Menlo Park, quad gates and medians will be constructed
- Atherton's two quiet zones are considered exceptional achievements. Palo Alto is on track to establish a quiet zone at Palo Alto Avenue. The full quiet zone would cover several miles

Examples of Supplementary Safety Measures

Crossing Closure

Four Quadrant Gate System

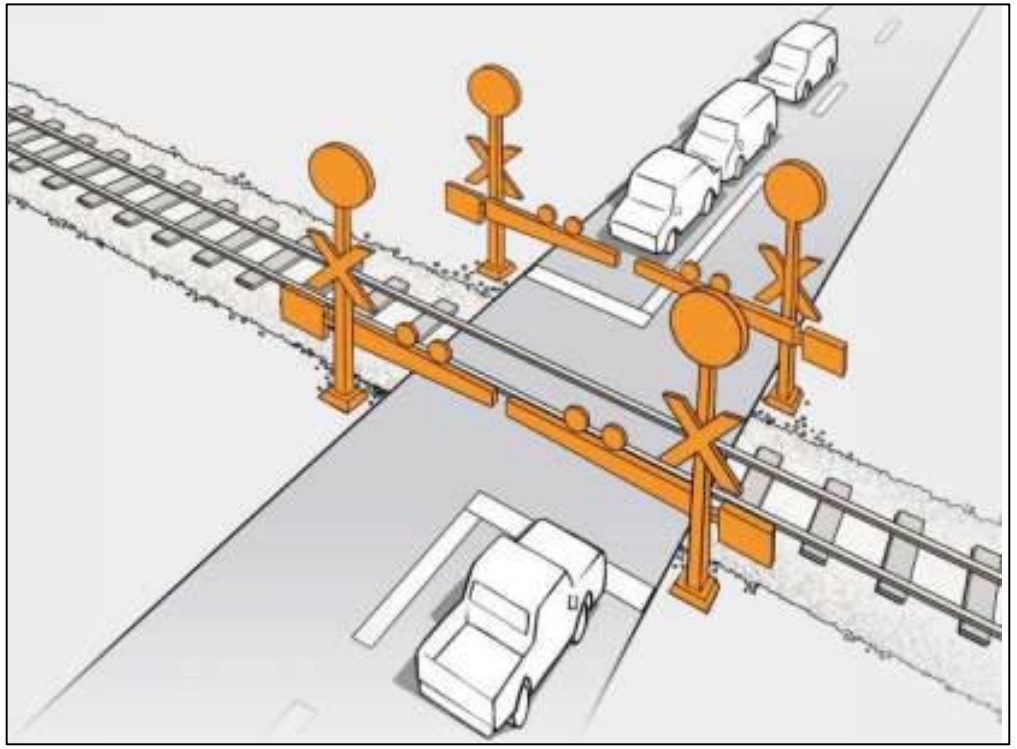
Gates with Channelization Devices

Gates with Medians

Source: Guide to the Quiet Zone Establishment Process, Federal Railroad Administration guide, Sept 2013

Safety considerations

- Horn noise is generated to protect the public and reduce accidents
- That's why a quiet zone is based on safety measures that are required by the Federal Railroad Administration
- **Menlo Park has four crossings**, all within the span of 6/10th of a mile, so the noise from train horns is concentrated and frequent
- A field study was conducted by Kimley-Horn and Associates, an engineering, planning, and design firm, to assess needed improvements
- They determined that **a quiet zone could be established across all four crossings after safety upgrades are made to the two intersections** – Oak Grove and Ravenswood – where approximately 75% of all crossings take place
- The city can also choose to upgrade lower-traffic intersections as budget allows



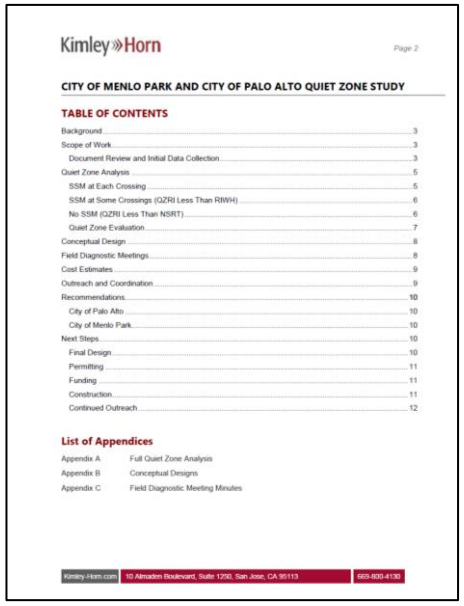
Quad gates eliminate the risk of traffic passing over the tracks, reducing the need for engineers to blow their horns as a warning

Source: Kimley Horn study

Steps to establish the quiet zone

2023

Field study and data collection by Kimley Horn completed and used to inform project development



Kimley»Horn

Page 2

CITY OF MENLO PARK AND CITY OF PALO ALTO QUIET ZONE STUDY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background ... 3
Scope of Work ... 3
Document Review and Initial Data Collection ... 3
Quiet Zone Analysis ... 5
SSM at Each Crossing ... 5
SSM at Some Crossings (QZRI Less Than RWH) ... 6
No SSM (QZRI Less Than NSRT) ... 6
Quiet Zone Evaluation ... 7
Conceptual Design ... 8
Field Diagnostic Meetings ... 8
Cost Estimates ... 9
Outreach and Coordination ... 9
Recommendations ... 10
City of Palo Alto ... 10
City of Menlo Park ... 10
Next Steps ... 10
Final Design ... 10
Permitting ... 11
Funding ... 11
Construction ... 11
Continued Outreach ... 12

List of Appendices

Appendix A Full Quiet Zone Analysis
Appendix B Conceptual Designs
Appendix C Field Diagnostic Meeting Minutes

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2024

Budget secured for final engineering design

2025

Permits

- CPUC General Order 88-B
- Encroachment permit
- Construction & Maintenance agreements
- California Environmental Quality Act
- National Environmental Policy Act

Funding sources decided for construction

2026 and beyond

Notice of intent filed with agencies

Construct quad gates for two crossings - Oak Grove and Ravenswood

Continued outreach to community

Inspect and certify quiet zone with necessary agencies

Ensure budget for maintenance and re-certification

This is an estimated timeline

It's based on best case scenarios to illustrate the main steps in the process

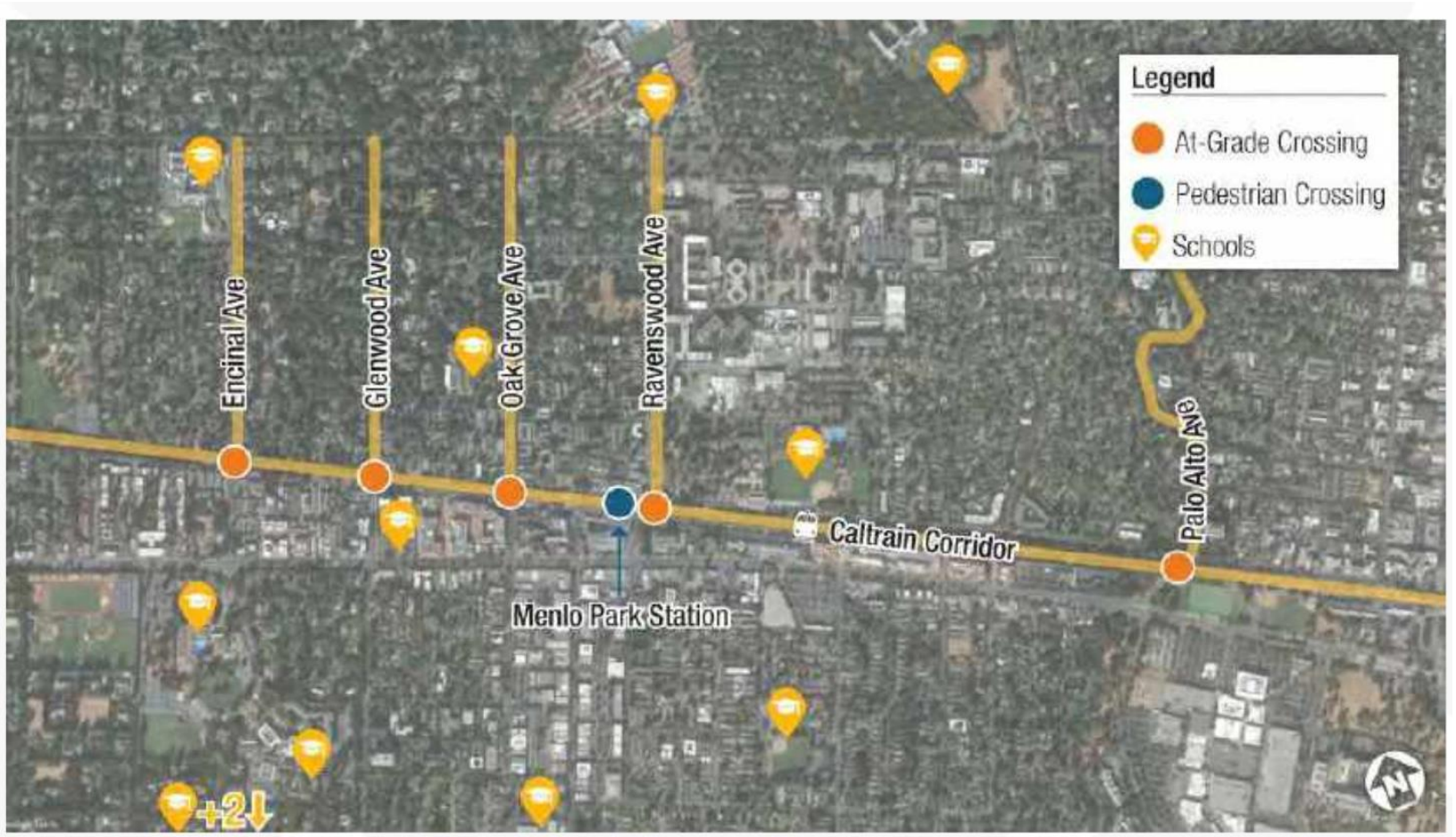
Implementation will require a coordinated approach with the Federal Railroad Administration, Caltrans, and the city team

Source: Kimley Horn study

A collaborative approach

This improvement project is a collaboration between various departments and groups in the city, multiple transportation agencies, and an active and dedicated group of resident supporters and local businesses

- Residents and businesses in different neighborhoods are advocating for change and providing feedback
- City Staff are focused on project scoping and implementation – City Manager's Office, Community Development, and Public Works
- City Council is providing guidance and prioritizing the project in the city's budget – the Capital Improvement Plan / Traffic and Transportation Section
- Budgeted for $130,000 in 2024-25. Identifying avenues to explore funding of $4,000,000 through various sources in the 2025-26 timeframe



Source: Kimley Horn study and Maria Amundson and Marcy Abramowitz

What’s next

- Final engineering designs completed
- Funding sources for construction identified
- Permitting process started
- Ongoing outreach and communication sessions held with residents across impacted districts
- Construction planned, started and finished!

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