



TOWN OF NEEDHAM

TOWN HALL

Needham, MA 02492-2669

Office of the
TOWN MANAGER

TEL: (781) 455-7500

FAX: (781) 449-4569

February 8, 2023

Jeff Gonneville, Interim General Manager

MBTA

10 Park Plaza

Boston, MA 02116

Michael Muller, Executive Director of Commuter Rail

MBTA

10 Park Plaza

Boston, MA 02116

Dear Mr. Gonneville & Mr. Muller:

I am writing regarding the private grade crossing at the Needham Golf Club. For many years, the Town of Needham has given careful consideration to the issue of establishing a quiet zone on the Needham Commuter Rail Line, as provided by the Federal Rail Administration (FRA) regulations 49 C.F.R. 222.35 et seq. As the Town continues to consider plans to designate a quiet zone at the public grade crossings in Needham, we are interested in working with the MBTA to reach agreement to end the routine sounding of horns at the private grade crossing at the Needham Golf Club as well.

The FRA regulations provide that a private grade crossing "...located within the boundaries of a quiet zone must be included in the quiet zone." 49 C.F.R. § 222.25(a). A regional FRA official has offered the opinion that a quiet zone cannot start or end at a private grade crossing. Accordingly, it appears that if the Town successfully designates a quiet zone covering the five public grade crossings in Needham (from Oak Street to West Street), train horns would still routinely sound at the Needham Golf Club crossing.

In the fall of 2019, I wrote to General Manager Poftak, requesting information as to whether the MBTA provides a process that the Town could engage in to end the routine sounding of train horns at a private grade crossing. In response, General manager Poftak suggested that the private grade crossing be replaced with an oversized culvert that would allow for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The private grade crossing at the Golf Club is used by pedestrians, golf carts and the golf course maintenance equipment, such as mowers and tractors. After careful review with the Golf Club, given the nature of the equipment that routinely uses this crossing, we have determined that the culvert concept is not feasible.

If the Town decides to move forward with the FRA process to designate all other crossings in Needham as a quiet zone, nearby residents will reasonably expect that silencing of horns may be accomplished at this location as well. Accordingly, I am writing to request that the MBTA help the Town identify options that would result in the elimination of the routine sounding of train horns at this private grade crossing. The Town and the Golf Club are willing to install safety improvements at this private crossing (which is actually Town land that is presently leased to the Needham Golf Club) to address any concerns.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Fitzpatrick".

Kate Fitzpatrick
Town Manager

cc: Select Board
 Needham Transportation Committee
 Representative Denise Garlick
 Bob Ernst, President, Needham Golf Club
 Carys Lustig, Director of Public Works
 David Davison, Assistant Town Manager
 Katie King, Assistant Town Manager