



TOWN OF NEEDHAM
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Kate

COMPLETED

9/16/19

Office of the
TOWN MANAGER

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September 16, 2019

Steve Poftak, General Manager
MBTA
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Mr. Poftak:

The purpose of this letter is to determine whether, and under what circumstances, the Town of Needham could request elimination of the train horn sounding requirement at the private at-grade crossing on the Needham Line at the Needham Golf Club.

The Town is not making such a request at this time but is asking for this information in an effort to determine options to mitigate, reduce or eliminate train horn sounding at that location.

In response to community concerns, the Town has for several years been exploring options for elimination of train horn sounding requirements at some or all of the five public and one private at-grade crossings in the Town. In 2015, the Town engaged the services of BETA Group, Inc. and its railroad consultant Egan Consulting Group to provide the Town with options for achieving this result.

In summary, the report concludes that the Town may petition for the creation of a quiet zone for the five public at-grade crossings by proposing to implement a series of supplemental safety measures. Approval of the Federal Railroad Administration and the MBTA would be required, and additional work by the MBTA on its infrastructure would be necessary. The cost of implementing these safety measures is in the range of \$1.3 million in 2015 dollars – exclusive of any costs incurred by the MBTA.

The Needham Select Board has not decided whether to proceed with the creation of a quiet zone for the public crossings.

The report also concludes that the private at-grade crossing at the Needham Golf Club cannot be included in a quiet zone because it is more than one quarter mile from the next at-grade crossing, and because under FRA regulations, a quiet zone cannot start or finish at a private grade crossing. There are no other at-grade crossings on the Needham Line east (toward Boston) of the private crossing at the Golf Club.

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The Town and officials of the MBTA have engaged in numerous conversations about ways to eliminate the at-grade crossing at the Needham Golf Club. To date, no satisfactory solution has been identified for the following reasons:

1. The reconstruction of a bridge over the tracks (eliminated decades ago) is impractical due to current ADA regulations, the introduction of double-decker train cars, and the reconfiguration of the golf course after the bridge was removed.
2. Construction of a culvert/tunnel in the only logical place would cause significant hardship for the Needham Golf Club given the current design of the course.
3. Construction of a culvert/tunnel would not eliminate the need for the grade crossing because of the size of the course maintenance equipment that routinely needs to cross right of way.

Residents in the vicinity of the Golf Club crossing are aggrieved that the train horns are very loud and include sounding late at night and at other times when the course is not used for golf purposes. Given that elimination of the crossing itself is not a viable option, and in order to ensure that all options for elimination of the train horn noise at the Golf Club crossing have been considered, the Select Board asks whether the MBTA would consider modification of the private at-grade crossing agreement to eliminate the use of train horns at this location. If so, what measures would be required to accomplish this?

As stated, the Select Board has not decided whether to seek such modification of the agreement but seeks information from the MBTA so that final decisions in the matter of a quiet zone and train horn noise along the Needham line may be made.

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,



Kate Fitzpatrick
Town Manager

cc: Select Board
Representative Denise Garlick
Rick Merson, Director of Public Works
Needham Transportation Committee
Needham Golf Club