

Comments & Responses To Noise Issues

Background:

The comments included in this document were derived from several sources, including the Public Hearing for the New Mexico Rail Runner Express service extension to Santa Fe held on August 21, 2007 and two more public meetings held on October 23, 2007 and October 30, 2007 respectively. Some comments were also generated from emails or phone calls as a result of these meetings. Specific references to home addresses or names have been omitted from the comments for privacy reasons. For further information on project plans and updates please consult the New Mexico Rail Runner Express website at www.nmrailrunner.com

Comments on Noise

General: *Many comments and concerns have been noted about noise throughout the duration of the study phases on the extension of service to Santa Fe. Several mitigation measures have been considered and put in place to address these concerns. First, the alignment that was chosen for service to Santa Fe utilizes existing transportation corridors as much as possible. One of the reasons behind this alignment selection was to place the train service in areas that are already influenced by transportation related noise. Second, the most offensive noise trains produce is from warning horns. The noise from warning horns affects large areas and is already present in the Santa Fe Southern corridor every time a train goes by. The NMDOT has committed to establishing a quiet zone at all at grade crossings within the City of Santa Fe. There are no at grade crossings in the County portion of the line. Implementing these quiet zones effectively eliminates existing train horn noise, and horn noise from Rail Runner trains. Third, new continuous welded rail, concrete ties, ballast and sub-grade will be constructed to create a very stable and relatively quiet operating environment. The remaining noise from the train has been analyzed to identify areas of concern. This analysis indicates that the residual noise will not result in significant impacts along the corridor and would not warrant the construction of sound walls. Still, additional analysis was conducted to identify what, if any relief, could be provided by sound walls. This analysis concluded that sound walls would have to be 12-14 feet tall to produce minor reductions in noise. In order for these walls to be effective they must also be continuous. Informal polls taken at a Casa Linda neighborhood association meeting and in the first session of the October 30th meeting amongst property owners adjacent to the tracks indicate that in both cases more people were opposed to sound walls than were in support. The opposition to walls was due to the visual intrusion that a 12 to 14 foot high wall would create and potential for visual impact from graffiti. As an additional measure the NMDOT has committed to a tree replacement and enhancement program for portions of the corridor where residential back yards are adjacent to the tracks. While tree plantings will have a minimal effect on noise, they may provide some residents with a higher level of comfort from a noise perspective. The noise analysis*

conducted on the portion of the proposed railway in the I-25 median indicates that noise produced from the train will be below the noise from the traffic utilizing I-25. The NMDOT is considering going one step further on the noise issue. Before and after noise monitoring of properties along I-25 and along the SFS will be conducted. If severe impacts (based on the noise abatement criteria used by the Federal Transit Administration are identified, the NMDOT and MRCOG will: (1) work with impacted neighborhoods to determine if consensus can be achieved on the use of noise walls; and, (2) if consensus on noise walls is achieved, the NMDOT and MRCOG will work with the City and County to address this issue through requests for legislative appropriations. Because many of the noise complaints we have received are from new neighborhoods located adjacent from the freeway, the NMDOT requests a concurrent commitment from the City and the County that would require all new residential developments within 300 feet of the highway right-of-way to provide noise walls or other appropriate noise mitigation measures as a condition of development approval.

1. Will the noise, pollution and shaking of houses be more or less than from the Pumice Plant? Will trains make a noise crossing roads, like it does now?

No analysis was conducted on these characteristics of the Pumice Plant, so there is no basis to provide such a comparison. However vibration from the train will not extend beyond 50 feet from the track centerline, which is within the rights of way limits of the rail corridor in this area. Train locomotives are powered by modern diesel-electric engines. The engines meet the latest EPA emission standards and use biodiesel fuel. The pollutants emitted by locomotives comply with all federal requirements and will not cause pollutant levels that exceed ambient air quality standards. Street crossings will be constructed to meet federal quiet zone standards. Thus, the use of warning horns at street crossings will not be needed. A more direct comparison can be made with existing Santa Fe Southern excursion trains, although as a result of the improvements that will be made by this project even these trains will make less noise than they do now because of quiet zones and the continuous welded rail (see General Comments above), but on all three accounts Rail Runner trains will still create less noise, emissions and vibration than the excursion trains.

2. Also the noise, even if you install gates, you will have the bell noise.

Flashing lights and bells will be used at street crossings.

3. I know the train will go forward. I would like a noise barrier installed along the tracks where residents live. I have a grandchild at home and sometimes taking a nap when the existing train goes by and blows its horn. I would also like for the state to replace my fence with a block wall to reduce the noise.

See General Comments above. Also the noise impact analysis did not identify noise levels from the train that warrant the use of noise barriers. Thus, the state

does not intend to construct noise walls. If a noise wall were to be constructed, it would require a minimum height of 12 feet and would have to be continuous along the edge of residential areas. If walls are discontinuous, their effectiveness is lost.

4. Also of much concern is the noise and air pollution that will be emitted.

See General Comments above.

5. Intersection of Rodeo Rd. and Galisteo – more trains crossing Rodeo Road will result in more cars backing up on Rodeo Rd. A need for noise walls will help the impact.

The traffic queues along Rodeo Road will extend approximately 400 feet in both directions from the rail tracks during the peak commute hours. The slower and stopped traffic during train pass-bys will not increase noise on Rodeo Road; in fact, traffic noise may be slightly less during these times. The residential areas near Rodeo Road and Galisteo are approximately 100 feet or more from the tracks. At this distance, average noise during the peak hour will be approximately 57 dBA – well below the level that would warrant a noise wall.

6. I live on Calle Lorca. The tracks are behind my house. 8 to 9 trains are a lot of trains. Noise. What can you do for me so I can enjoy peace and quiet time for us?

See General Comments above. While noise walls are not warranted and will not be constructed, trees will be planted within the rail right-of-way in areas where the tracks are adjacent to residential neighborhoods. While the trees are not intended for noise abatement, they will provide a visual buffer between the tracks and residential areas.

7. We need the state to build us a wall to block the noise the fence we have will not block the noise. The state could purchase our home and place us somewhere away from the Rail Runner tracks.

See General Comments above. The impact from the train does not warrant the relocation of any residents.

8. I'm very concerned about the noise. I live in Las Estancia near where the train will be making a turn and going down a grade. I don't feel the noise analysis adequately addressed this.

See General Comments above. The maximum grade within the Santa Fe area is 2% or less. This grade does not cause an appreciable noise increase with diesel-electric locomotives and short trains used by the Rail Runner. Noise levels in the Las Estancia area as well as in other neighborhoods, will not reach levels that

approach or exceed the criteria used by the Federal Transit Administration (or other agencies) that warrant noise abatement.

9. I'd like to know the construction schedule for the portion of Rodeo Rd. to I-25. The construction bright lights and beeping warning signals keep me up at night. Can this be mitigated? How will dirt be back hauled from the field south of Rosemont? Will dump trucks be using Galisteo to Rodeo or I-25?

Night construction in the area between I-25 and the Santa Fe Southern railway will continue through November and possibly well into December. Night construction is occurring in this area because of the need to transport construction materials and equipment from the median to outside of the highway right-of-way and to transport the excavated materials back into the median where they are used for fill. By performing this at night, less traffic is disrupted on I-25 and the safety of workers is improved. Construction crews have agreed to point lights away from residential areas, install sound blankets on generators, and to use the low setting for backup horns on construction vehicles. These measures went into use on November 2nd. Galisteo will not be used to haul materials.

10. Major concerns about property value related to noise! We need a wall along I-25 to protect the value of homes along that area like the wall done on 285 north of town.

See General Comments above. Noise levels from train operations are not expected to adversely affect property values. To verify this conclusion, the NMDOT and MRCOG has researched the effect that similar projects has had in other cities and is also evaluating the effect that the Rail Runner has had on properties in the Albuquerque area.

11. We need walls to protect our neighborhoods from sound.

See General Comments above.

12. I am concerned about vibration from the train.

A vibration analysis was conducted for the project. That analysis showed that vibration from the train will not extend beyond 50 feet from the tracks. Field investigations of the Rail Runner operating within the Albuquerque verify this finding.

13. Noise along Galisteo and Siringo will increase because of the grade near Siringo perhaps the grade could be cut down.

The maximum grade along the Santa Fe Southern alignment is less than 2%. The grade is less than that near Siringo. The slight grade in combination with the type and length of train being used will not measurably increase noise.

14. Trains will still blow their horns because Santa Fe Drivers are so bad.

The type of gates that will be used along the Santa Fe Southern will prevent the worst drivers from inadvertently entering the railway when a train approaches. While nothing is foolproof, the experience in other parts of the country with the types of gates that will be used for the Rail Runner shows great success in their safety record.

15. Will SFS continue to use its horn?

No. The tourist train currently operated by the SFS will have the same exemption from warning horn as the Rail Runner.

16. Does noise from the train comply with City and County Ordinances?

The County does not have a noise ordinance. The Land Use Code includes a noise section; however, it appears to be applicable to non residential land developments only, and has never been applied to a public transportation or roadway project. However the noise analysis indicates that if this section were applied to the Rail Runner project, that it would meet the criteria. The County has been asked to clarify incomplete parts of this noise sections so that a definitive answer to this question can be generated. The City of Santa Fe Noise Ordinance includes a provision for highway traffic noise (Section 10-2.10) but does not specifically address train noise. However, if the noise levels applied to streets and highways were applied to trains, the Rail Runner would not be in violation of the City noise ordinance. The noise ordinance specifies an hourly Leq of 64 dBA within residential hours. The maximum hourly Leq produced by the Rail Runner within Santa Fe residential areas is 62 dBA.

17. Can a Jake Brake ordinance be put in place for I-25?

Interstate 25 is under the jurisdiction of the NMDOT. The NMDOT does not have rules against air brake use. However, the NMDOT may be willing to post signs that advise motorists of local rules against the use of air brakes. This would require that the County adopt such rules and discuss advisory signs with NMDOT District 5.

18. I am concerned about noise impacts to West Rabbit Road and potential well draw down as a result of the construction.

Noise impacts caused by the train along I-25 were not identified. The hourly average noise level produced by the train is generally less than the noise

produced by traffic. In most locations, train noise will be anywhere from 2 to 8 dBA less than traffic noise. Thus, train noise impacts along I-25 are not expected.

Water used during track construction will primarily come from treated effluent and not ground water. Therefore, there is no reason to expect impacts to wells in that area.

19. A noise wall should be built along I-25.

Noise impacts caused by the train along I-25 were not identified. The hourly average noise level produced by the train is generally less than the noise produced by traffic. In most locations, train noise will be anywhere from 2 to 8 dBA less than traffic noise. Thus, train noise impacts along I-25 are not expected and construction of a noise wall is not warranted.

20. Using noise averages is misleading

The use of equivalent noise levels (logarithmic averages) are used for all surface transportation projects including rail, transit, and highway projects. The assessment of noise impacts for the Rail Runner followed the procedures and methodology of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The noise impact assessment procedures used by FTA are based on 1 hour and 24-hour "average" levels. To understand why this is done, consider a train system with 1 operation per hour and a train system with 100 operations per hour. If single event noise levels (passbys) were used to assess impact, both systems would be rated the same. By averaging the noise of all operations over a specified period (1 hour or 24 hours), the differences between a train system with few operations is distinguished from one with many operations.

21. Noise as you measure it is subjective.

Human response to low and moderate noise levels is subjective, i.e., what irritates one person is not offensive to another. The standards used by federal transportation agencies have been developed to reduce the subjective response by establishing noise thresholds that most people would agree are too noisy and intrusive.