

Staff Report

November 14, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the Town Council
FROM: Merrill Buck, Town Engineer
RE: Authorize the Mayor to Sign a Letter of Commitment to the California Public Utilities Commission for At-Grade Railroad Crossing Improvements that would be part of a Phase II Sierra College Boulevard Road Widening Project from Taylor Road to Bankhead Road

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Town Council adopt a resolution authorizing the Mayor to submit a Letter of Commitment to the California Public Utilities Commission, indicating the Town's intent to construct At-Grade Railroad Crossing Improvements, as part of a Phase II Sierra College Boulevard Widening Project, from Taylor Road to Bankhead Road

Issue Statement and Discussion

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) authorization is required for proposed roadway improvements involving realignments within existing railroad right of ways. The process for obtaining approval involves the public agency working with the railroad and the CPUC to agree upon both the public necessity for altering the rail-crossing and the improvements that will be implemented.

For the Sierra College Boulevard Roadway Widening project currently in construction, the project had been designed to utilize the four existing lanes currently crossing the railroad tracks (two in each direction of travel), in such a way that Sierra College Boulevard would be allowed to flow with two northbound and two southbound lanes. Currently only one lane in each direction is allowed across the intersection of Taylor Road.

The proposed project modifications triggered a review process between Town, Union Pacific Railroad, and CPUC staff that generated a list of recommended improvements, without which they would not support the project. Some of these improvements can be completed in the short term, such as building a raised center median, removal of guard rails, construction of curbing adjacent to the shoulder crossing arms, construction of a longer CA MUTCD compliant northbound merge taper, installation of a pre-signal for southbound Sierra College Boulevard, and the installation of train activated, no right turn blank-out signs, from westbound Taylor Road. Whereas other improvements, consisting of an advance railroad preemption system, will take more time to design and implement.

With the exception of the pre-signal for southbound traffic, the Town incorporated the short-term improvements into the project's scope during the bidding phase, by addendum. But we have not been able to secure the permit from the CPUC necessary to build them. The CPUC has

stated that by building only the proposed short-term improvements, and allowing the crossing to operate with two lanes in each direction, it removes the incentive for constructing the long-term improvements. For this reason, they are not supporting a phased approach.

At a meeting held on October 20, 2023, between Town, UPRR, and CPUC staff, it was suggested that if the Town would commit to building the longer-term advance railroad preemption system, the CPUC would consider approving the interim, short-term improvements. This would allow the Town to mitigate Costco traffic in the short-term, while providing additional safety measures that the railroad supports, and ensure that the longer-term advance preemption system is pursued.

Separate from the railroad improvements, pressure is also growing for the Town to construct a second phase of Sierra College Widening, north of Taylor Road to Bankhead Road to address capacity deficiencies. Traffic is getting heavier, to where the intersection of Bankhead Road needs, at a minimum, left turn pockets off Sierra College Boulevard. A protected left turn pocket, or two-way left-turn lane, is also necessary to accommodate traffic flows in and out of the Loomis Basin Veterinary Clinic. Finally, this section of roadway is one of the heaviest in terms of reported accidents in the Town's recently completed Local Road Safety Plan.

It is therefore recommended that in conjunction with committing to the design and construction of the longer-term railroad improvements, that the Town also commit to building this second phase of Sierra College Boulevard. With Council concurrence, staff will issue a Request for Proposals to start the process of selecting a design consultant for this work, and will incorporate the project into the FY 2024-25 Capital Improvements Program.

Staff has done some initial outreach with the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency (PCTPA), which doubles as staffs the South Placer Regional Transportation Authority (SPRTA) and coordinates with the SPRTA Board of Directors. SPRTA was formed to help mitigate transportation impacts caused from regional development and has listed the ultimate widening of Sierra College Boulevard to four lanes as one of their projects. The proposed road widening as a Phase II project, could conceivably gain SPRTA support, since it aligns with their adopted projects. Should this occur, based upon a proportional traffic approach (regional vs. local), roughly 70% of the road widening cost could be funded by SPRTA.

CEQA Requirements

There are no CEQA implications associated with the recommended action.

Financial and/or Policy Implications

There are no immediate financial impacts associated with authorizing the Letter of Commitment to the CPUC, however, it would place the proposed improvement in the Town's Capital Improvement Program to be funded and constructed over the next 3-5 years. It is anticipated that the cost to the Town for this work would be approximately \$1.0 - \$1.5 for the railroad improvements and between \$1.0 - \$3.0 million for the road widening, depending upon if SPRTA financial support can be secured.

Attachments

- A. Resolution, Including Exhibit A – Letter of Commitment
- B. CPUC letter dated October 11, 2023, not supporting the Town's proposed improvements without an advanced railroad preemption system.

Item 13 Attachment A

TOWN OF LOOMIS

RESOLUTION 23 - _____

**A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF LOOMIS
AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO SIGN A LETTER OF COMMITMENT TO THE CALIFORNIA
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION FOR AT-GRADE RAILROAD CROSSING
IMPROVEMENTS THAT WOULD BE PART OF A PHASE II SIERRA COLLEGE
BOULEVARD ROAD WIDENING PROJECT FROM TAYLOR ROAD TO BANKHEAD ROAD**

WHEREAS, California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) authorization is required for proposed roadway improvements involving realignments within existing railroad right of ways; and

WHEREAS, the process for obtaining approval involves the public agency working with the railroad and the CPUC to agree upon both the public necessity for altering the rail-crossing and the improvements that will be implemented; and

WHEREAS, after consulting with the Union Pacific Railroad and the CPUC, a list of recommended improvements has been developed, some of which can be implemented in the short-term, and some of which will take longer to design and implement; and

WHEREAS, the short term, improvements, which the Town is prepared to construct, include building a raised center median, removal of guard rails and construction of curbing adjacent to the shoulder crossing arms, construction of a longer CA MUTCD compliant northbound merge taper, installation of a pre-signal for southbound Sierra College Boulevard, and the installation of train activated, no right turn blank-out signs, from westbound Taylor Road; and

WHEREAS, the longer-term improvements, which the Town needs more time to design and implement, include an advance railroad preemption system; and

WHEREAS, the CPUC does not support a phased approach of constructing just the short-term improvements because they believe this would remove the Town's incentive to construct the longer-term improvements; and

WHEREAS, at a meeting held on October 20, 2023, between Town, UPRR, and CPUC staff, it was suggested that in order to reconcile this, a letter of commitment to the CPUC could be drafted showing Council support, commitment, and intent to build the longer-term railroad safety improvements; and

WHEREAS, separate from the railroad improvements, the Town Engineer has recommended that the Town Council support a Phase II, Sierra College Widening Project from Taylor Road to Bankhead Road to address capacity deficiencies; and

WHEREAS, with Council concurrence, staff will issue a Request for Proposals to start the process of selecting a design consultant for this work and will incorporate the project into the FY 2024-25 Capital Improvements Program, to be funded and constructed over the next 3-5 years.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the Town of Loomis hereby authorizes the Mayor to sign and deliver the Letter of Commitment to the California Public Utilities Commission, attached as "Exhibit A"; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that by submitting the Letter of Commitment, the Town of Loomis represents and certifies its intention to implement the proposed long-term improvements, consisting of an advanced railroad preemption system, within the next 3-5 years.

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Engineer is directed to begin the process of selecting a consultant to design both the railroad preemption system and the Phase II Sierra College Widening Project from Taylor Road to Bankhead Road, and include this work as a funded project in the 2024-25 Capital Improvements Program.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 14th day of November 2023 by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

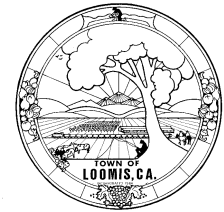
ABSTAINED:

Mayor

ATTEST:

Deputy Town Clerk

TOWN OF LOOMIS



November 15, 2023

Mr. Pablo Vargas
California Public Utilities Commission
Utilities Engineer, Rail Crossings and Engineering Branch
300 Capitol Mall, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

By email: pablo.vargas@cpuc.ca.gov

Subject: Letter of Commitment
DOT 750573C, Sierra College Boulevard At-Grade Railroad Crossing Improvements

Dear Mr. Vargas:

On behalf of the Town of Loomis, this letter is to declare our intent to commit to the design and construction of an advance railroad preemption system with a pedestrian clearance phase as a future phase of railroad crossing improvements along the Sierra College Boulevard at-grade crossing north of Taylor Road. We will issue a Request for Proposals for design services by the end of the year (2023), award a design contract, and then pursue the completion of that design, with input and coordination from the UPRR and CPUC, so that it can be advertised for construction and implemented within a 3-5 year timeframe.

Background

The Town of Loomis has initiated improvements along Sierra College Boulevard, south of Taylor Road, to create an additional northbound and southbound traffic lane, as mitigation for traffic impacts that are anticipated as part of a new Costco that is opening at the end of February 2024.

The project was to tie into the four existing lanes (two, in each direction of travel), that cross over the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, thereby allowing traffic along Sierra College Boulevard to flow with two through lanes in both directions. Interim improvements proposed as part of the Town's project included the construction of a raised center median, removal of guard rails and construction of curbing adjacent to the shoulder crossing arms, construction of a longer CA MUTCD compliant northbound merge taper, installation of a pre-signal for southbound Sierra College Boulevard, and more recently, by change order, we've arranged for the installation of train activated, no right turn blank-out signs, from westbound Taylor Road.

In collaborating with the UPRR and the CPUC, the Town has learned that the Rail Crossings and Engineering Branch has concerns with the Town's proposed improvements because they represent a phased approach. That the crossing will ultimately require the installation of an advanced railroad preemption system with a pedestrian clearance phase. And that if the interim improvement were to be approved, there would be no incentive for the Town to move forward with a second phased project that would install the advanced railroad preemption system.

November 15, 2023
Mr. Pablo Vargas
Letter of Commitment

The Town of Loomis and UPRR have acknowledged that the proposed southbound pre-signal improvements with the existing simultaneous preemption is a viable option that would provide queue prevention at the crossing. It was noted in the diagnostic meeting minutes that existing southbound queuing was observed across the tracks, therefore the addition of a pre-signal would make a positive difference in terms of mitigating the queuing observed at the railroad crossing. Not to mention that the construction of a raised center median, a longer CA MUTCD compliant northbound merge taper downstream of the crossing, and the installation of no right turn blank-out signs are all interim improvements that help address grade crossing improvement recommendations provided by the diagnostic team.

At a meeting held on October 20, 2023, between Town, UPRR, and CPUC staff, it was suggested that if the Town would commit to building the advance railroad preemption system, the CPUC would consider committing to approving the interim improvements. This appears to be a win-win-win situation as it would allow the Town to mitigate Costco traffic in the short-term, while providing southbound queue prevention at the crossing, and ensure that the longer-term advance preemption system is pursued.

Statement of Intent

On November 14, 2023, during a regularly scheduled Town Council meeting, staff recommended that the Town Council adopt a resolution authorizing the mayor to sign a Letter of Commitment, addressed to the CPUC, to fund and install an advance railroad preemption system with a pedestrian clearance phase at the Sierra College Boulevard at-grade crossing. The resolution was adopted, and by way of this letter, I am informing you of the Town's intent to pursue the recommended improvements.

Sincerely,

Mayor Danny Cartwright
Town of Loomis

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

300 Capitol Mall, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95814



October 11, 2023

Merrill Buck
Town Engineer
Town of Loomis
3665 Taylor Road
Loomis, CA 95650

SENT VIA EMAIL

RE: CPUC Response to Town of Loomis' Proposal for Pre-signal Installation

Dear Merrill Buck,

This refers to the City of Loomis' proposed project to alter the Sierra College Boulevard rail crossing of the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) track, in the Town of Loomis (Town), County of Placer. The crossing is identified as CPUC Crossing Number 001A-112.90 and DOT Number 750573C.

The crossing is a northwest-southeast, two-lane roadway that consists of one track. The crossing is equipped with two curb-mounted Commission Standard 9-A (Flashing Light Signal Assembly with Automatic Gate Arm and Additional Flashing Light Signals over the Roadway on a Cantilevered Arm) warning devices and one median-mounted Commission Standard 9 (Flashing Light Signal Assembly with Automatic Gate Arm) warning device. The crossing is located at approximately 80 feet north of the Sierra College Boulevard and Taylor Road intersection and is currently interconnected with the traffic signal at the intersection with simultaneous railroad preemption.

The Commission's Rail Crossings and Engineering Branch (RCEB) reviewed the proposed modification by the Town that includes a pre-signal for southbound Sierra College Blvd leading to the at-grade crossing in an initial phase while deferring installing advance preemption to a future project as part of a phased approach.

RCEB staff does not support the proposal because it does not address the following issues:

- The existing preemption time does not provide adequate warning time for a design vehicle to clear the track in the worst-case scenario.
- The existing preemption time does not provide any pedestrian clearance time prior to the track clearance green interval. Pedestrians within the crosswalks during the track clearance green phase negate the effectiveness of the railroad preemption.
- The right-turn movement from westbound Taylor Road toward the crossing is not prohibited during the signal preemption sequence.

RCEB staff recommends installing advance railroad preemption with a pedestrian clearance phase and train-activated turn prohibition signs for westbound right turn on Taylor Road.

Merrill Buck
October 11, 2023
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If you have any questions, please contact Pablo Vargas at (916) 532-8807 or pablo.vargas@cpuc.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Pablo Vargas

Pablo Vargas
Utilities Engineer
Rail Crossings and Engineering Branch
Rail Safety Division