

34TH ST CORRIDOR QUIET ZONE

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK & PROPOSED OPTIONS TO REDUCE COST OF QUIET ZONE

Background

Supporters of the 34th St Corridor Quiet Zone (formerly the Garden Oaks Quiet Zone) met with officials from the City of Houston Public Works & Engineering Dept on 8/3/09. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss potential options to reduce the estimated cost to implement the proposed 34th St Quiet Zone. Implementing the corridor as is would be cost prohibitive due to the upgrades required at most of the grade crossings. As a result, supporters and Public Works officials discussed an alternative approach of possibly closing some of the railroad crossings as a way to significantly reduce the cost. Out of the 11 crossings within the 34th St Quiet Zone, 5 crossings were identified as possible candidates for closure (Oak Forest, Golf, Brinkman, Cortlandt and Cornell). Public Works officials requested that supporters of the Quiet Zone solicit feedback from the community on the proposed crossing closures. Below is a recap of the effort to solicit feedback, a summary of the feedback and other proposed options to reduce the cost of the 34th St Quiet Zone.

Effort to Solicit Feedback

Supporters of the 34th St Quiet Zone undertook a considerable effort over the course of a month to get feedback on the possible crossing closures. Feedback was solicited through numerous channels as outlined below:

- The possible street closures were discussed at monthly meetings for every major neighborhood within the span of the 34th St Quiet Zone. Specifically, street closures were discussed at civic club and neighborhood meetings for Oak Forest, Garden Oaks, Shepherd Forest, Garden Oaks Court and Independence Heights.
- Supporters met with some schools and businesses that may be impacted by the Quiet Zone and crossing closures. For example, we met with representatives from Garden Oaks Elementary, St. Rose of Lima Catholic School, Eutex International and Orchard Communities.
- Feedback was solicited via newsletters, flyers and email distribution lists. For example, the August edition of the Shepherd Forest Times requested feedback and it was hand delivered to every household (~700) within Shepherd Forest sections 1, 2 and 3.
- Feedback was requested through the 34th St Quiet Zone website (www.34thquietzone.com) and other online forums including the Oak Forest and Garden Oaks message boards.

Summary of Feedback

We received numerous comments on the proposed crossing closures. Below is a high level overview of the feedback by crossing.

- Oak Forest – There is considerable traffic on Oak Forest and there is quite a distance between the next two crossings – Ella and E TC Jester. There was broad opposition to closing Oak Forest.
- Golf – There was good support for closing Golf and very little opposition to closing it. Those most concerned with closing Golf were concerned with how traffic flow would increase on Alba. Also, they feel that if more traffic ends up routing to Alba (either from closing Golf or Brinkman), the signal timing at Alba and 34th Street should be reviewed. Some people against closing Golf said they would be okay with closing Golf if the Alba/34th light timing is changed. There was also some concern about truck traffic from Batterson Iron Works which is a metal fabrication company. Batterson may use Golf to access 34th St and there was some concern about where the truck traffic would go. However, Batterson has alternate routes to 34th via Judiway to Ella or 35th

St to Alba so we believe the concerns around Batterson can be mitigated. Based on feedback, we believe Golf can be closed with minimal impact to residents and businesses.

- Brinkman – This was the most controversial crossing. Many residents supported closing Brinkman, but many were also opposed. In particular, St. Rose of Lima Catholic School and Church are opposed to closing Brinkman because a number of folks use Brinkman to access the school and church. The owner of a property in the vicinity of the Brinkman crossing is very supportive of the Quiet Zone and indicated a willingness to assist with funding of the upgrades for Brinkman up to \$65,000 if it helps get the Quiet Zone implemented. We believe closing Brinkman will be controversial and may ignite challenges to the overall project.
- Cortlandt – Overall, there has been very little outward support for the 34th St Quiet Zone from residents and business owners in Independence Heights (IH). This may be due to lack of knowledge about the Quiet Zone or maybe just disinterest. At the Independence Heights Super Neighborhood meeting, residents seemed opposed to closing any streets within IH and did not particularly seem interested in the Quiet Zone. Of the two possible closings in IH, there was less opposition to closing Cortlandt. Based on the low traffic count on Cortlandt and less opposition to closing Cortlandt, it is our recommendation to leave Cortlandt on the list of possible crossing closures.
- Cornell – There was considerable opposition to closing Cornell. There is a church right on the corner of Cornell and the railroad track and residents of IH said it was not an option to close Cornell.

Based on feedback from the community, we believe there are only two crossings that are less controversial and that are realistic candidates for closure – Golf and Cortlandt.

Options to Reduce Cost of 34th St Quiet Zone

Through the process of soliciting feedback on the possible crossing/street closures, we received many comments supporting the Quiet Zone. Based on the community's desire to do whatever is necessary to get the Quiet Zone implemented in some form that will benefit as many residents as possible, we have listed several options below that will reduce the cost of the 34th St Quiet Zone. Options 3, 4 and 5 include removing some Independence Heights crossings from the Quiet Zone. Although the ideal outcome would be to have every crossing included, this may not be possible if funding is an issue. The 34th St Corridor Quiet Zone Group and residents across the area would rather see a smaller Quiet Zone that would benefit thousands of people rather than no Quiet Zone at all.

Of the options below, we see option 2 as the optimal solution. Will option 2 and an estimated savings of \$225,000 be enough to get the 34th St Quiet Zone fully funded and implemented? If not, we would like to propose the other options in this order: 5, 3, 4. If more cost savings over option 2 is needed, we believe Main and Cornell are options to remove from the Quiet Zone because they account for close to 30% of the estimated cost of the Quiet Zone. On a cost-causation basis, it makes sense to remove Main and Cornell in order for the 34th St Quiet Zone to get funded. In addition, we received the response in Independence Heights that they seemed satisfied with things “as they are” – although it’s debatable if they really are. Although removing Cornell and/or Main from the Quiet Zone would reduce the cost substantially, we remain supportive of the full corridor being included in the Quiet Zone if feasible, and if it can be implemented without delay. If significant opposition to the Cortlandt closing arises in the future that would make it infeasible to close, we urge the City of Houston to proceed with option 3.

All options below close Golf and keep Brinkman and Oak Forest open. All options also include seeking funding for the Brinkman upgrades from the owner of the property near the Brinkman crossing. The main differences in the options center around the Cortlandt, Main and Cornell crossings.

Option 1: Close Golf.

Estimated savings: \$165,000 (\$100k from closing Golf and \$65k from property owner)

Option 2: Close Golf and Cortlandt.

Estimated savings: \$225,000 (\$100k from closing Golf, \$60k from closing Cortlandt and \$65k from property owner)

Option 3: Close Golf. Take Cornell and Main out of the Quiet Zone. Quiet Zone would then run from Cortlandt to W TC Jester.

Estimated savings: \$725,000 (\$100k from closing Golf, \$250k from not having to upgrade Main, \$310k from not having to upgrade Cornell, \$65k from property owner)

Option 4: Close Golf. Take Cornell, Cortlandt and Main out of the Quiet Zone. Quiet Zone would then run from Yale to W TC Jester.

Estimated savings: \$785,000 (\$100k from closing Golf, \$250k from not having to upgrade Main, \$310k from not having to upgrade Cornell, \$60k from not having to upgrade Cortlandt, \$65k from property owner)

Option 5: Close Golf and Cortlandt. Take Cornell and Main out of the Quiet Zone. Quiet Zone would then run from Yale to W TC Jester.

Estimated savings: \$785,000 (\$100k from closing Golf, \$60k from closing Cortlandt, \$310k from not having to upgrade Cornell, \$250k from not having to upgrade Main, \$65k from property owner)

We look forward to working with the City of Houston to get the 34th St Corridor Quiet Zone funded and implemented. We are willing to meet with the City of Houston to further discuss the feedback and options outlined in this document. The area within the span of the 34th Quiet Zone is almost entirely residential and the Quiet Zone would improve the quality of life for thousands and thousands of people.

Sincerely,

34th St Corridor Quiet Zone Group

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