



Springfield begins working toward no train horns on Third Street

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Trains on the Third Street tracks in downtown Springfield could fall silent as early as next summer.

The city has started the regulatory process required for federal approval of a “quiet zone” on the Union Pacific-Amtrak line once safety upgrades are completed, including six-foot security fences, crossing closings, and gate and signal upgrades at remaining crossings. Temporary barricades are scheduled to go up Wednesday at Union, Jackson, Canedy, Allen and Cedar streets with permanent barricades planned within 60 days.

Public Works Director Mark Mahoney said in an email Monday a mid-November review of the project is planned with state and federal transportation officials and representatives of Union Pacific Railroad.

“That will involve a review of the proposed quiet zone corridor. After that, we will have a notice of intent (for the quiet zone) that will be filed within 60 days to review,” said Mahoney. “All of the track and crossing upgrades will have to be completed and inspected.”

A final notice of intent to create a train-horn quiet zone would follow, according to Mahoney. Federal approval would take at least 21 days. While there are variables in the timeline, horns could be silenced by summer, he said.

Work on Third Street is part of the final phase of high-speed rail improvements between St. Louis and Chicago. Major work for the seven-year, estimated \$2 billion project should be completed by the end of the year, according to the Illinois Department of Transportation. The goal is Amtrak speeds up to 110 mph in rural areas between St. Louis and Chicago, though a specific start of the service has not yet been announced.

Preliminary construction has begun for installation safety fencing on both sides of the Union Pacific tracks between Stanford Avenue and Sangamon Avenue. Once improvements are completed, the current 25 mph speed limit for Third Street trains in Springfield will increase to 40 mph.

Silencing train horns should boost efforts to draw residents downtown, said Lisa Clemmons-Stott,

executive director of Downtown Springfield Inc.

“When I first moved to Springfield, I lived downtown near the tracks, and it’s very loud,” said Clemmons-Stott. “Making downtown a quiet zone will increase the number of people interested in living here.”

Lindsay Keeney, who manages the Old Capitol Farmers’ Market for the Illinois Stewardship Alliance, said blaring train horns would not be missed during the Wednesday and Saturday market on Adams Street between Third and Fifth streets.

“A train goes through about three or four times,” said Keeney. “We have to stop our conversations, hold our ears, and really just be annoyed all those times, and you get that community feel kind of paused for that time the trains come through.

“We’d definitely be really excited to not have to deal with that anymore, not have to hear that,” she said. “... But safety is our number one concern. We want to make sure that with this quiet zone comes upgrades and safety features to keep everyone safe down there while we’re shopping.”

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Where things stand

Even as high-speed rail improvements near completion on the Third Street rail corridor, work has continued on long-term plans to consolidate Union Pacific and Amtrak trains on the Norfolk Southern corridor on 10th Street. Here is an update.

High speed rail

* Temporary barricades: Go up Wednesday at Union, Jackson, Canedy, Allen and Cedar streets with permanent closing within 60 days. Final phase of Third Street work includes six-foot safety fencing on each side of the tracks from Stanford Avenue to Sangamon Avenue, updated crossing gates and signals, and installation of pedestrian gates. Major high-speed rail construction targeted for completion by the end of the year toward Amtrak speeds up to 110 mph between St. Louis and Chicago.

* Rail consolidation: First railroad underpass completed summer of 2016 at Carpenter Street between Ninth and 11th streets at cost of \$17.2 million; next phase of underpass construction at Ash and Laurel streets expected to take three years at estimated cost of \$50 million; total cost of consolidating Third Street trains on 10th Street estimated at \$315 million. Goal is to relocate Third Street trains by 2026.