

THE TRAIN-HORN AND A PROPOSAL FOR A “QUIET ZONE”

As residents of Austell, many of us are tired of train-horns especially late at NIGHT. The horns are excessive, intrusive and they are a health issue, not to mention they devalue properties in the immediate area (who wants to buy their dream house near a train track listening to a train horn all hours of the night). Indeed, train horns are so loud they can be heard miles away. No one in Austell is immune from that, especially those living near and around downtown.

Still, while many of us by now are conditioned to accept that there is no solution to this problem, it is important to know that many small cities in Cobb county have already found and implemented solutions, not just to help their citizens have a good night's sleep, but also to help revitalize their cities and improve quality of life by reducing “noise pollution.”

Actually, train horns can be addressed in couple of ways. Either by “Wayside Horns” or by implementing a “Quiet Zone.”

WAYSIDE HORNS is an alternative to a full quiet zone. The wayside horn is positioned at the crossing and directed down the road. When a train approaches, the wayside horn replaces the train horn and directs the sound down the track. The overall noise is significantly reduced by this focused horn. Gates, flashing lights, a constant warning time device, and the power out indicator must still be a part of an improvement that includes wayside horns though.

Implementing a “QUIET ZONE” (in essence a no-horn zone) is obviously the preferred option and is how several small cities in Cobb county like Acworth, Smyrna, Mableton, and others, have handled this. To be considered for a quiet zone, the crossing must meet a number of typical requirements: Each pass within the desired quiet zone must have gates, flashing lights, constant warning time devices, and power out indicators. The quiet zone can include one crossing or multiple crossings but must be at least ½ mile in total length. The quiet zone must not have any other non-quiet zone crossings within a ¼ mile before the first crossing in the zone or after the last crossing in the zone. If another crossing is within the ¼ mile minimum distance, the quiet zone must be extended through that adjacent crossing and then be without a non-quiet zone crossing for an additional ¼ mile away.

Of course, if you ask any city official, or even a candidate running for the mayor's position, why Austell have not implemented a “quite-zone” in the past, the first thing most will say is that because this will cost money we don't have. Is that true, though? Is it true that no one addressed this issue before because we never had the money, or is it because we haven't been able to manage our budget properly? Truth be told, in how many projects Austell invested money in the past that we all know was money wasted! All while, late last year, Cobb county approved another “Quiet Zone” few miles away at Nickajack Road in Mableton. That particular investment, a “24-7 quite zone,” cost only \$100,000!

I believe, the question is not whether Austell has the money to invest in a “Quiet Zone” but whether our elected officials have been truthful to their constituents! In fact, how many times in the past did our recent mayor and city officials come across one hundred thousand dollars but decided to blow the money away on other projects, while sadly they have been wondering, at the same time, why our downtown struggles? They never understood that no residential or even commercial developer will ever consider investing money in our town if no one is willing to buy or rent those buildings next to a train track listening to a train-horn 24-7. The fact is, \$100K in the grand scheme of things, is an insignificant amount when trying to revitalize an area and elevate its image.

The truth is Austell had several opportunities in the past to do something about this, including recently, but our elected officials never had the vision or the skills to close the deal. The fact is that money comes and goes through our city hall, but Austell somehow always stays the same. For example, the recent negotiation on the sale of 54 acres to Taylor & Mathis to provide additional transportation services to Norfolk Southern Railway terminal (which by the way I personally think it was a great mistake), that was another wasted opportunity to negotiate a deal where Taylor & Mathis or Norfolk Southern could have paid for our badly needed “Quiet Zone.” Obviously, Taylor & Mathis, as well as Norfolk Southern Railway, are getting what they want. What did Austell really get out of this deal other than money for a parcel sold? Where was our Mayor, our deputy mayor Ollie Clemons Jr., or our City Council, during these negotiations? And, most of all, why this deal was ever negotiated behind closed doors and without the public’s knowledge? What happened to the transparency we were promised?

My name is Chris Djonis. With great honor, I am announcing my candidacy for mayor of Austell. As your new mayor, I pledge to you that one of the very first things I will try to negotiate to everyone’s benefit, is a “Quiet Zone” for Austell. Without it, our downtown and our city will never have a chance to prosper. **I NEED YOUR VOTE ON NOVEMBER 5TH.**

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