



Office of the
TOWN MANAGER

TOWN OF NEEDHAM
TOWN HALL
Needham, MA 02492-2669

TEL: (781) 455-7500
FAX: (781) 449-4569

2024 Annual Town Meeting
Article 30
Appropriate for Quiet Zone Project

What is a Quiet Zone?

Federal law requires trains to blow non-emergency horn blasts at all railroad crossings at a volume of 96-100 decibels for a minimum of 15 seconds. This is the current status in Needham. The same federal law allows for the creation of a Quiet Zone, which eliminates the requirement of blowing non-emergency horn blasts. Upgraded Supplemental Safety Measures (SSMs) must be installed at the crossings to create a Quiet Zone. While non-emergency horn blasts are eliminated, the train engineer retains full discretion to use the train horn if there is any cause for concern at crossings or anywhere else on the tracks. All other safety elements, including bells, flashing lights, and gates all remain the same.

What will the Appropriation of \$750,000 fund?

The Select Board established the Quiet Zone Work Group to oversee a comprehensive refresh of the scope and budget estimates for a Needham Quiet Zone. Members of the working group included a member of the Finance Committee, a member of the Select Board, a member of the Transportation/Mobility Planning Coordinating Committee, the Town's Representative to the MBTA Advisory Board, a member of Safer Quieter Needham, and the Town Manager.

The transportation engineering consultants engaged to conduct this refresh estimate that the construction costs for the recommended solution will be approximately \$3.5 million in addition to the \$750,000 requested in this article. Each crossing has unique conditions that must be accounted for, and many federal, state, and local stakeholders influence the result.

The appropriation will fund a diagnostic review including the design and engineering of the entire corridor from Oak Street to West Street.¹

What are SSMs?

¹ Proposed upgrades to Great Plain Avenue may affect the timing and inclusion of this crossing within the corridor. The diagnostic review is necessary to make that final determination. Considerations include public safety response times and adequate locations for upgraded signal equipment. If the Great Plain Avenue crossing is delayed, two separate Quiet Zones can be installed – one from the Junction to Oak Street, and the other from May Street to West Street.

To proceed with the Quiet Zone process, the Risk Index of the entire Quiet Zone must be reduced below the Nationwide Significant Risk Threshold established by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Examples of SSMs proposed for the Needham Line include median barriers and “Quad Gates,” both of which would prevent cars from “slaloming” around closed gates.

What SSM is planned for each grade crossing?

The Quiet Zone Working Group reached consensus on the following *preliminary* recommendations:

- West Street – Quad Gates
- Rosemary Street – Flexible Median Barriers
- May Street – Quad Gates
- Great Plain Avenue – Flexible Median Barriers (permanent barriers may be considered in the design of proposed upgrades to Great Plain Avenue in the future).
- Oak Street – Quad Gates

What is the plan for the crossing at the Golf Club?

The federal law that enables Quiet Zones excludes private and/or non-roadway crossings that are beyond a maximum distance from the nearest public roadway crossing. Unfortunately, the Golf Course is beyond that maximum allowable distance. A more complicated and time-intensive process is needed to identify a practical, cost-effective solution for this crossing. While Article #30 allows for the advancement of five of the six crossings in town, the Quiet Zone Work Group will continue its work investigating approaches to achieving similar safety and quality-of-life enhancements at the Golf Course crossing