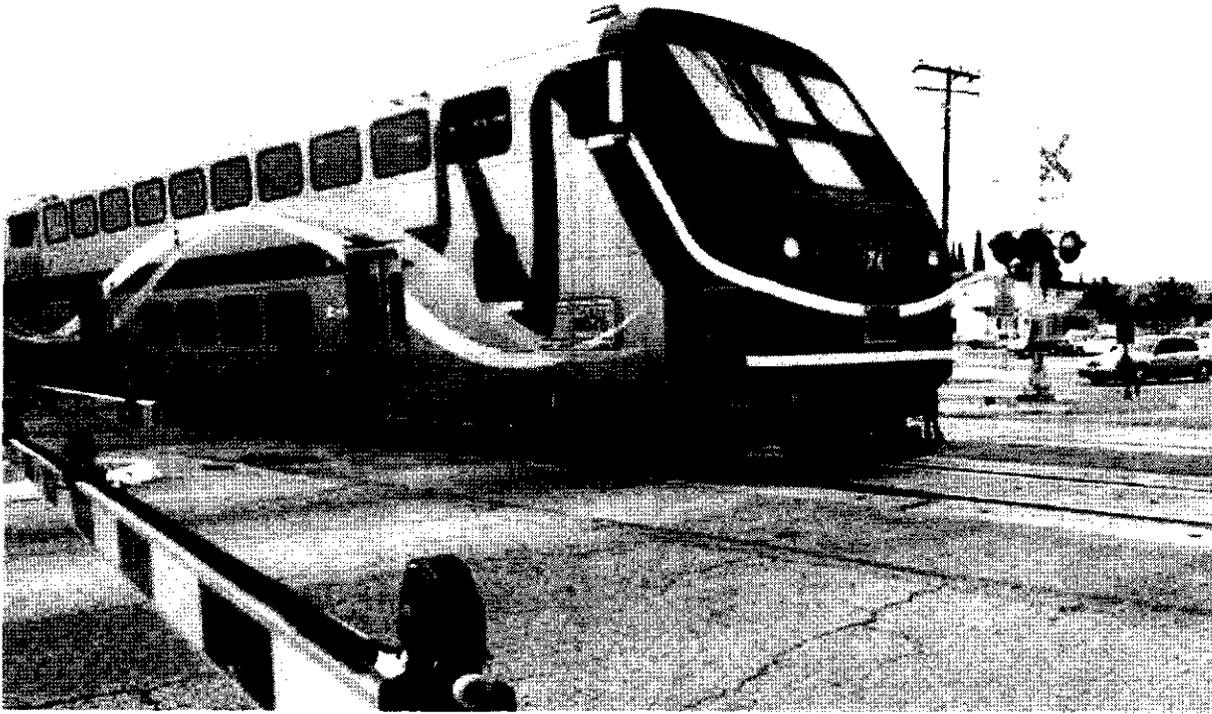


Why Metrolink train cars are louder than they used to be



Covina residents frustrated with the Metrolink train horns want to find a solution to mitigate the noise, but it would be costly to the city, officials say. *staff file photo*

By Stephanie K. Baer, The San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Covina residents who live near Metrolink tracks are accustomed to the sound of train conductors blowing their horns as they approach street crossings but some say that noise has recently gotten louder.

It's not their imagination.

Over the last few months, Metrolink has added locomotives at both ends of their trains as transportation officials investigate how crash-resistant cab cars used at the front of trains performed in a collision near Oxnard last year. The locomotives, which are being leased from Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Co. through November, have horns that are positioned near the top of the vehicle, allowing the sound to emit farther than the cab car horns typically located at the bottom of the vehicles.

"Any person who lives throughout Southern California that is within ear shot of the trains will hear a noticeable difference," said Metrolink spokesman Scott Johnson, adding that the agency has received a number of complaints from residents living along the San Bernardino Line as it adds more of the locomotives to its fleet of trains.

In a letter sent to Metrolink and the mayor of Covina last week, Ron Schwolsky, who lives in the Covina Palms community near Azusa Avenue, complained about "excessive" horn blowing. The Covina resident said in an interview the noise has gotten worse in recent weeks.

“The quality of life is what’s an issue and it’s just out of control,” said Schwolsky, who collected around 100 signatures from neighbors who are also annoyed about the noise.

His neighbor Susan Ippong said that not only do the horns wake her up at midnight three days a week, the trains also set off car alarms as they travel through the community.

“It’s very, very annoying,” said Ippong, 63, who has lived across the street from the tracks for over 10 years. She said the horns have been louder in recent months.

Ippong and other residents said they would like to see the city pursue establishing a “quiet zone” as several communities in Orange County have done. Although federal regulators require train engineers to honk in two long bursts, a short burst and a long burst when approaching railroad crossings, cities can establish quiet zones if they make the necessary safety upgrades at the crossings.

“It’s expensive,” said Covina Mayor John King, noting that the city has looked into the idea in the past. “The city has to pay for all of the upgrades (and) if something should happen in the future all of the liability falls on the city.”

Quiet zones in eight Orange County cities were established a few years ago as part of an \$85 million project funded by a voter-approved half-cent sales tax, state dollars and city funds.

“We are very sensitive to the issue and we always want to look to balance safety with the concerns of our residents,” King said.