



JPB Board of Directors  
Meeting of December 5, 2024

Correspondence as of November 29, 2024

# Subject

1. Re: Caltrain Horns – *Staff Response*
2. Sponsoring First Robotics Team 4904

**From:** [Martin J Sommer](#)  
**To:** [Caltrain BOD Public Support](#)  
**Cc:** [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#); [Board \(@samtrans.com\)](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Caltrain Horns  
**Date:** Tuesday, November 26, 2024 8:48:51 PM

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Dear Caltrain BOD Public Support,

Thank you for the additional information. I have read through the suggested General Code of Operating Rules (GCOR) and Title 49 (CFR 49), and nothing states as "required", the practice of sounding the bell/horn on every entry and exit of a grade separated station, such as University Ave station in Palo.

This is simply a "choice" made by Caltrain, is different from other train systems (BART, Muni, etc) in the SF Bay area, and is unjustified by federal or state requirements. This choice, is creating unneeded noise pollution.

Please limit the ringing of bells or sounding of horns while entering University Ave station, to potential imminent danger, such as a person either on or too close to the tracks.

Thank you,  
Martin

On 11/5/24 10:38 AM, Caltrain BOD Public Support wrote:

Dear Martin Sommer,

Thank you for your feedback regarding the use of the bell and horn at the Palo Alto University Ave. Station. We appreciate your concerns about noise pollution and the impact it has on the community.

To clarify, "Company policy" references the General Code of Operating Rules (GCOR), which aligns with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulations and Title 49 (CFR 49). While we understand your suggestion to limit the use of the bell and horn to instances of imminent danger, it is important to emphasize that the bell is utilized for safety reasons prior to entering, departing, and while passing through passenger stations. This practice is required, and it is meant to alert pedestrians near the platform of an approaching or passing train, ensuring their safety.

Additionally, the whistle/horn will be sounded when approaching individuals,

equipment, or any potential hazards on or near the track, regardless of any whistle prohibitions. This is a critical safety measure, especially considering the nearby crossing at the Palo Alto station.

We value your input and are committed to maintaining a balance between safety and community concerns.

Thank you for your understanding.

Your Caltrain BOD Public Support Team

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**From:** Board (@caltrain.com) <[board@caltrain.com](mailto:board@caltrain.com)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, October 27, 2024 4:32 PM  
**To:** Caltrain BOD Public Support <[CaltrainBODPublicSupport@caltrain.com](mailto:CaltrainBODPublicSupport@caltrain.com)>  
**Subject:** FW: Caltrain Horns

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**From:** Martin J Sommer <[martin@sommer.net](mailto:martin@sommer.net)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, October 27, 2024 11:32:43 PM (UTC+00:00) Monrovia, Reykjavik  
**To:** Caltrain BOD Public Support <[CaltrainBODPublicSupport@caltrain.com](mailto:CaltrainBODPublicSupport@caltrain.com)>  
**Cc:** Board (@caltrain.com) <[board@caltrain.com](mailto:board@caltrain.com)>; Board (@samtrans.com) <[board@samtrans.com](mailto:board@samtrans.com)>  
**Subject:** Re: Caltrain Horns

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Dear Caltrain Support Team,

Thank you for acknowledging that sounding the bell/horn each time a train enters or exists the Palo Alto University Ave. Station, is NOT an FRA requirement, and is simply a Caltrain "policy".

Before taking this issue into legal action regarding a public agency generating unneeded noise pollution, would you be willing to only sound the bell/horn, whenever there is "imminent danger"? For example, if someone has jumped or fallen onto the tracks, or is too close to the platform edge?

If so, this would provide a workable solution, and reduce the bell/horn noise by at least 90%. I believe this would also educate people of real emergencies, vs routine noise.

Thanks, and please let me know.

Sincerely,  
Martin

On 10/25/24 1:27 PM, Caltrain BOD Public Support wrote:

Dear Martin Sommer,

Your message to the Caltrain Board of Directors was referred to me for response. The Board members will receive a copy of our correspondence. Thank you for your feedback regarding the sounding of the bell at the Palo Alto Caltrain Station. We appreciate your concerns and understand the importance of minimizing noise pollution, especially in areas where efforts have been made to create a quieter environment.

We would like to clarify that, according to company policy, it is required to sound the bell when approaching and traveling through every station platform. This rule is in place to ensure the safety of all individuals in the vicinity, as it serves as a warning to make them aware of an incoming train. While we recognize that University Ave. Station is grade-separated, the safety of the general public remains our top priority.

We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused and appreciate your understanding of the safety measures we have implemented. Your feedback is invaluable, and we will continue to evaluate our practices to balance safety and community concerns.

Thank you for your understanding.

Best regards,

Your Caltrain BOD Public Support Team

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**From:** Martin J Sommer <[martin@sommer.net](mailto:martin@sommer.net)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 15, 2024 3:34:18 AM (UTC+00:00) Monrovia, Reykjavik  
**To:** Todd Douglas <[DouglasT@samtrans.com](mailto:DouglasT@samtrans.com)>  
**Cc:** Board (@caltrain.com) <[board@caltrain.com](mailto:board@caltrain.com)>; Board (@samtrans.com) <[board@samtrans.com](mailto:board@samtrans.com)>  
**Subject:** Re: Caltrain Horns

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Hi Todd,

Thanks for your response. According to FRA document 222.21 When

must a locomotive horn be used?, " ... the locomotive horn on the lead locomotive of a train ... shall be sounded when such locomotive or lead cab car is approaching a public highway-rail grade crossing".

The significant part here, is "grade crossing". When it comes to sounding a horn or bell at stations, it boils down to two issues: a) is the station "at grade" with the tracks, and/or b) is there an imminent hazard of death or injury to a person or persons.

University Ave. Station in Palo Alto, is grade-separated, and thus the only validation for ringing a bell or blowing the horn, is if someone has jumped or fallen onto the tracks, and is in "imminent danger".

The idea of the new electric trains ringing their bell on every entry and exit of the University Ave. Station, is not required, and is creating public noise pollution ... something we worked so hard to eliminate, in electrifying Caltrain.

Please stop sounding the bell and/or horn, every time a train enters or exists University Ave. Station in Palo Alto!!

Ref: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-222.21>

Martin

On 10/14/24 3:24 PM, Todd Douglas wrote:

**Hello Martin Sommer,**

**Thank you for taking the time in contacting Caltrain with your comments concerning horn noise in your area. Your comments were sent to Rail Operations for further handling.**

**The application of a train's horn/bells is governed by Federal and State law. One of the locations where they must sound their horn is when the tracks cross a street and also pull into the station.**

**I can tell you we frequently inspect the volume of these systems to ensure they fall within the mandated decibel range for this type of equipment.**

**We are sorry the sound has been disturbing you, and will maintain our programmed monitoring of these systems to ensure they are only as loud as necessary.**

**Again, thank you for your comments.**

**Regards,**

**Todd Douglas**

San Mateo County Transit District

Customer Service Dept.

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"Turn technical vision into reality."

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"Turn technical vision into reality."

**From:** [Benjamin Quach](#)  
**To:** [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#)  
**Subject:** Sponsoring First Robotics Team 4904  
**Date:** Tuesday, November 26, 2024 10:30:03 PM

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You don't often get email from [benquac@nuevaschool.org](mailto:benquac@nuevaschool.org). [Learn why this is important](#)

**ATTENTION:** This email came from an external source. Do not open attachments or click on links from unknown senders.

Hello Caltrain,

I am a student at The Nueva School in San Mateo, and a member of Team 4904: Bot-Provoking. We at Bot-Provoking compete in the *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC) for high school students, like myself. The FIRST Robotics Competition aims to empower learning and help young students develop life-long passions for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics(STEM). Every year, FRC challenges students to design, build, wire, and program industrial-sized robots to play a new game every year.

We are reaching out to you because we would love Caltrain to join us as a sponsor this year. Throughout our 12 years of competing in FRC, our mission is to, “empower students through meaningful, collaborative experiences”. We do this by allowing students to run and lead the team without heavy mentor influence. We gain hands-on experience in industrial settings by machining as many parts as possible in-house. Last year, we won the Industrial Design award at the San Francisco Regional, celebrating our robot’s build quality in relation to its function. Team 4904 members spend numerous hours weekly contributing to the robot and outreach events, helping support our community’s interest in STEM. However, FRC is an expensive learning experience.

With your sponsorship, we can empower learning at Team 4904. Sponsorship funds go towards all aspects of the team, including registration, new materials, tools, outreach events, and everything in between. Your sponsorship will empower our learning as we receive hands-on experience during competitions and throughout the build season.

In addition to supporting Team 4904, we offer ways to recognize your gracious contributions. We can display your company name on our website, robot, pit space, and more. This aids in brand visibility and also displays your commitment to supporting the growth of STEM-related fields. We provide four distinct contribution levels for sponsors with benefits, such as pit space, a logo on the robot, or a shout-out on social media. Sponsors will also receive updates throughout our team’s progress, competition updates, and a potential gift on behalf of team 4904.

If you have any questions, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at [benquac@nuevaschool.org](mailto:benquac@nuevaschool.org) or [botprovoking@gmail.com](mailto:botprovoking@gmail.com).

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Benjamin