

ORIGINAL

Decision No. 36122

BEFORE THE RAILROAD COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of the Investigation on the Commission's own motion into the abolishment of Potrero Avenue grade crossing in Richmond. ) Case No. 4666

In the Matter of the Application of SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY for an Order authorizing the abandonment and closing of an existing crossing at grade of Potrero Avenue, or County Road No. 9, and the SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY in the City of Richmond, near Southern Pacific Company Station of Stege, Contra Costa County, California. ) Appl. No. 25381

R. S. MYERS, for Southern Pacific Company

THOS. M. CARLSON, City Attorney and J. A. McVITTIE, City Manager, for City of Richmond

E. G. POSS, for Division of Highways

BY THE COMMISSION:

OPINION AND ORDER

Upon the recommendation of the Engineering Division of the Transportation Department, the Commission instituted an investigation on its own motion (Case No. 4666, November 18, 1942), for the purpose of determining if, in the interest of public convenience and safety, the crossing of Potrero Avenue, or County Road No. 9, with the tracks of Southern Pacific Company, in the City of Richmond, California (Crossing No. A-13.5), should be abolished and closed to public use and travel. Subsequently, Southern Pacific Company filed an application (Application No. 25381, November 20, 1942), for an order authorizing the abandonment and closing of the same crossing. The two matters were consolidated for hearing and such hearings were held before Examiner Hall on December 10 and 16, 1942.

The road known as Potrero Avenue, or County Road No. 9, is an old established roadway. It is located about three-tenths of a mile south and approximately parallel to Cutting Boulevard, which runs in an easterly and westerly direction through the City of Richmond. Both Potrero Avenue and Cutting Boulevard cross the Southern Pacific Company tracks. Evidence disclosed that Potrero Avenue was in existence prior to the construction of the Southern Pacific Company tracks, but is not now used as a main thoroughfare. Until recently it was relatively unimportant and served as a means of access to the residential section of Richmond located between Potrero Avenue and Cutting Boulevard. When the shipyards were constructed in January, 1941, Potrero Avenue was used to some extent by shipyard workers because it furnished a direct route west to one of the shipyards slightly shorter in distance than going by way of Cutting Boulevard, situated three-tenths of a mile north.

The Richmond Industrial Access Road was constructed in September, 1942, to facilitate movement of shipyard traffic. This is a four-lane arterial highway lying parallel to the Southern Pacific Company tracks northerly from Albany and turning left, or west, on Potrero Avenue to the shipyards in Richmond. Potrero Avenue, extending easterly, crosses the Southern Pacific Company tracks at this point. The crossing was temporarily barricaded due to the construction of the Access Road, and now, since Key System is building the Richmond Shipyard Railway for the Maritime Commission (2 tracks), parallel to the Access Road and located between the Access Road and the existing Southern Pacific Company tracks, the crossing has remained temporarily barricaded.

It also appears that an extensive housing project is now under construction in the vicinity of Potrero Avenue west of the

railroad tracks and the access highway. It is claimed by the City of Richmond that the crossing should remain open to provide access to and from this area, particularly for the convenience of school children attending the Stege School, which is located to the east of the railroad on Potrero Avenue, and also to enable residents to reach the business district in the vicinity of Stege. There is evidence, however, that school children are handled by bus which at present uses a grade crossing approximately four-tenths of a mile to the south at Stege Station. The superintendent of schools testified, however, that this bus would use the Potrero Avenue crossing if it were open.

With respect to the use of the crossing by residents in reaching the shopping district, the shopping facilities in the vicinity of Stege Station are extremely limited and not such as to attract any great volume of business. There would be some use of the crossing in reaching business houses located along San Pablo Avenue in the vicinity of its intersection with Potrero Avenue. The main business section of Richmond, however, is located to the west of the railroad tracks, and traffic to and from this section and the Potrero Avenue housing project and adjacent districts has no occasion whatever to cross Southern Pacific tracks at Potrero Avenue.

Potrero Avenue crossing consists of a narrow, paved roadway, approximately 20 feet in width having approach grades of minus 1.7 per cent on the west and minus 17 per cent on the east. The crossing is rough and extremely hazardous. The railroad tracks at this point are in a cut about seven feet below the surrounding ground. Five tracks are involved, two of which are high speed main lines, carrying approximately sixty trains daily. In addition there are numerous switching moves as the main Southern Pacific lead to the harbor and shipyard district connects with the main line in the immediate

vicinity of the crossing. A count made on December 4th and 5th (Exhibit No. 7) disclosed 33 such movements in 24 hours. Such extensive use will undoubtedly continue throughout the war emergency.

In connection with the shipyard activities in Richmond and other war industries, Southern Pacific Company also finds it necessary to use for storage purposes the secondary tracks which cross Potrero Avenue adjacent and on either side of the main line tracks. Cars standing on these tracks practically obscure the views in all directions and add much to the hazards of the Potrero Avenue crossing.

When the crossing was in use it presented a serious menace to the safety of motorists. Eastbound automobile traffic from the shipyards was highly congested, vehicles would be standing on the railroad tracks, and backed up for a considerable distance awaiting their turn to negotiate a position on Pullman Avenue, which is a through artery parallel to the tracks on the east. Since the construction of the Access Road and the Richmond Shipyard Railway, the hazard at the crossing, if restored to use, would be increased. The factors now confronting the motorist who would use Potrero Avenue crossing include congested traffic on the Access Road, especially during shift changes at the shipyards; the Richmond Shipyard double track railway; the Southern Pacific Company tracks located in a cut; the steep grade east of the railroad tracks and upon entering Pullman Avenue; and the problem of waiting to get on Pullman Avenue and backing up traffic in so doing. Such traffic would necessarily need to stand on the railroad tracks because the approach distance from the near track to Pullman Avenue is only about 40 feet, or the approximate length of two vehicles. There is an acute danger of automobiles becoming trapped on the railroad tracks and causing a serious accident in case of an oncoming train.

The construction of the Richmond Industrial Access Road and its location being on the west or the bay side of the railroad tracks, has obviated the necessity of crossing the tracks for a large percentage of the shipyard traffic. This crossing is a definite hazard during the war emergency and should be closed. Undoubtedly a certain degree of local objection will be existent because of the closing, yet the inconvenience experienced should be considered a necessary measure in the judicious prosecution of the war effort. Whether or not it should be permanently closed should be left for future determination.

It is hereby found as a fact that public safety requires the closing of Potrero Avenue crossing with the tracks of Southern Pacific Company during the present wartime emergency and for six months thereafter, therefore.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Southern Pacific Company is authorized and directed to abolish by physical closing, within thirty (30) days from the effective date of this order, the existing crossing at grade of Potrero Avenue (County Road No. 9) over the main line tracks of the Southern Pacific Company, Crossing No. A-13.5, in the City of Richmond, near Stage Station, Contra Costa County, California, for the duration of the present wartime emergency and for six months thereafter, or until further order of the Commission.

Within thirty days after abolishment and closing pursuant to this order, Southern Pacific Company shall so advise the Commission in writing.

The effective date of this order shall be twenty (20) days from the date hereof.

Dated at Los Angeles, California, this 26<sup>th</sup> day of

January 1943.

Francis K. Stevenson  
J. L. HARRIS  
James D. ...

Commissioners