ORIGINAL.

Decision No. 44869

BEFORE THE PURLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of the Application of THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA AND SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY, a corporation, for authority Application No. 30811 to eliminate the railroad grade crossing No. 2-150.0 at Bluff Road, Montebello. California, by closing Bluff Read. In the Matter of the Commission's investigation concerning a grade Case No. 5179 crossing within the City of Montebello, California. Commission investigation of the grade crossing of Greenwood Street and the Case No. 5198 tracks of The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company in the City of Montebello.

Robert W. Walker and Frederic A. Jacobus, by <u>Frederic A. Jacobus</u>, for applicant; <u>Harry C. Williams</u>, for City of Montebello, respondent; <u>Bruce D. Forbes</u>, for himself and wife, <u>H. L. Chapin</u>, in propria personna, <u>J. W. Trotter</u>, for Trotter Mfg. Co., <u>Frank De Salve</u>, for De Salve Transit Mix Concrete, <u>E. Rossi</u>, in propria personna, <u>Anthony Saich</u>, for Saich Bros., <u>J. P. Warren</u>, for Burgbacher Co., <u>Homer R. Heacock</u>, in propria personna, <u>Edward Lucas</u>, in propria personna, and <u>Norman Gare</u>, in propria personna, protestants.

OPINION

In Application No. 30811 The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway
Company requests permission to close the crossing at grade of Bluff Road (Crossing
No. 2-150.0) in the city of Montebello.

By Case No. 5179 the Commission, on its own motion, instituted an investigation into conditions at Bluff Road for the purpose of determining whother or not public convenience and necessity and consideration of public safety require that the crossing be abolished by physical closing.

Case No. 5198 was subsequently instituted by the Commission, on its own motion, to determine whether public necessity and consideration of public safety require the alteration or widering of, or additional protection for, the grade crossing at Greenwood Avenue (Crossing No. 2-149.5) in the city of Montebello.

Public hearings were held in Montebello on March 16, 1950, April 27, 1950, and May 25, 1950, before Commissioner Craemer. It was stipulated that these three proceedings would be consolidated for hearing and determination.

The main line tracks of the Los Angeles Division's third district of The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company between Los Angeles and Fullerton are on the portion involved herein located between Washington Boulevard and Anaheim-Telegraph Road and extend through the southern portion of the city of Montebello in a southeasterly direction. A heavy volume of both freight and passenger service is conducted over this section, including all streamliners to San Dicgo. The railway across the Ric Hondo consists of a single-track main line to a point approximately 190 feet west of the existing crossing at Bluff Road. From that point it continues northwesterly as a double-track main line. All of the above is on tangent alignment and under Centralized Traffic Control.

Bluff Road, in general, is a north-south street within the city of Montebello. On that portion between Washington Boulevard on the north and Anaheim-Telegraph Road on the south, the street is constructed along the higher plane of the west bank of the Rio Hondo, with the exception of the crossing over the railway. The easterly boundary of the city lies slightly to the east of Bluff Road between these limits.

Approximately one-half mile to the west of Bluff Road, Greenwood Avenue, another north-south street within Montebello, connects Anaheim-Telegraph Road on the south with the business section of the city located to the north of Washington Boulevard, and crossos the railway main line at grade.

East of Bluff Read, property both to the north and south of the railway comprises the undeveloped lowland of the Ric Hondo stream-bed and flood-control area, with one industry located adjacent to Anaheim-Telograph Read. The railway across this district is constructed on a fill for a short distance adjacent to

⁽¹⁾ Hereafter referred to as the "railway."

⁽²⁾ Directions used herein will be referenced to the compass rather than those employed in railroad designation.

Bluff Road, thereafter continuing easterly across the railway's seven-span trestle which bridges the Rio Hondo. The base of the trestle girders is approximately 14 feet above the stream bod.

Property which lies between Bluff Road and Greenwood Avenue to the north of the railway is principally residential in character, with Montebello Fire Station No. 2 being located in this quadrant on Greenwood Avenue. Sycamore Street abuts the right of way on the north side of the tracks and, beginning at Bluff Road, parallels the railway as a 30-foot roadway to Greenwood Avenue, thence continues westerly as a traveled road and ends in a connection with Anahoim-Telegraph Road in the vicinity of Garfield Avenue.

The property along the east side of Greenwood Avenue lying south of the railway and north of Anaheim-Telegraph Road has experienced some development by heavy industries. Along the north side of Anaheim-Telegraph Road there are a few light industries located in the general area about Greenwood Avenue. Property along the west side of Bluff Road between the railway and Anaheim-Telegraph Road, a distance of 3,350 feet, has been undergoing some industrial development and at this time a public dump and a few light industries have been established. The record shows a total employment of 23 persons by the combined industries along Bluff Road in this district. The remaining property which lies between the above-described industrial developments is shown by the record to be devoted principally to agriculture.

The applicant, in prosenting its testimony, introduced a total of ten exhibits, included in which were photographs of the existing crossing at Bluff Road (Crossing No. 2-150.0), a plan and profile of conditions at that location, a map of the general vicinity, recent counts of the traffic which utilized the crossings of Bluff Road and Greenwood Avenue (Crossing No. 2-149.5), and a certified copy of Ordinance No. 266 of the City of Montebello (see footnote 3 for details).

Applicant's witnesses testified to topographical limitations which have the effect of creating an abnormal element of hazard at the Bluff Road grade

crossing. The tracks from the west to a point between Greenwood Avenue and Bluff Road are constructed at approximately the same elevation as the adjacent land. Easterly from that point the tracks are on a descending grade of 0.4 per cent, in order to negotiate a crossing of the Rio Hondo and conform to the terrain beyond. This descent results in the presence of a cut which, starting to the east of Greenwood Avenue, progressively increases in depth toward the Rio Hondo, where banks beside the track rise to heights in excess of 10 feet above top-of-rail grade.

Bluff Road, constructed on the higher plane, is paved to a width of 40 feet to the north of the track, with a light surface in good condition, and 20 feet on the south side, with the surface of poor quality and badly pitted. The street alignment is so established beyond the proximity of the railway that were the scutherly course projected northerly its center line would intersect that of the northerly course slightly to the north of the right of way on a plane approximately nine feet above the top-of-rail elevation. Instead of such a direct connection, however, the northerly and southerly sections are joined by a connecting roadway, some 300 feet in length, which resembles a detour. This connection is veered sharply to the east and, by steep descents along the west bank of the Ric Hondo, crosses the railway at grade at the east end of the railway cut. Along this connection, the width on the north side is narrowed to 13 feet, with that on the scuth side converged into 11 feet. Conditions of pavement on both of these approaches are poor, and grades in excess of nine per cent on the south and 13 per cent on the north side are encountered. Across the track area the pavement is fairly level, 24 feet wide, and in good condition. Two Standard No. 3 wigwags have been installed by the railway to warn of approaching trains, actuated by ringing circuits which extend 2,850 feet to the west and 4,000 feet to the east.

Two boulevard stop signs have been placed by the city on either side, in advance of the track, to cause cross-traffic to stop before crossing the rail-way. The city has, in addition, erected two large special signs beside the read

in advance of the descent, proclaiming the street on the right of way to be closed to public users, under the provisions of Ordinance No. 266.

Applicant's witnesses testified that train speeds at this point were normally 55 miles per hour for passenger trains and 40 miles per hour for freight trains in the westbound direction. On eastbound movements the normal speeds for the corresponding trains were 40 miles per hour and 30 miles per hour, respectively. The operating timetable, however, provided for a maximum speed in this section of 100 miles per hour for passenger trains, with 55 miles per hour for freight trains. Stopping distances for trains operated between 40 and 55 miles per hour were estimated by the railway to be between one-half and three-quarters of a mile.

WHEREAS that portion of the public highway in the City of Montebello known as Bluff Road at the place where it traverses the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fo Railway Company right-of-way has become extremely hazardous to public travel on said highway, and

WHEREAS said City does not have the finances necessary to construct a properly guarded and safe grade crossing at said place;

NOW. THEREFORE, the City Council of the City of Montebello does hereby ordain as follows:

SECTION 1. That portion of that certain highway with the City of Monte-bollo commonly known as Bluff Read lying within the Northerly and Southerly boundary lines of the right-of-way of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company having become extremely hazardcus to public use is hereby withdrawn from the personal access and use of members of the public at any time, sole and except those members of the public who own property along said Bluff Read in the neighborhood of the said crossing who find it necessary to use the same for the purpose of transporting produce grown on the said property or for the purpose of ingress or egress to said property. Such persons may use the said crossing, but do so at their own risk.

This withdrawal of the said portion of the said road from public access, with the exceptions above stated, shall be for such period of time until there shall be constructed at the point of intersection of the said highway with the said Railway Company right-of-way of a safe and proper grade crossing.

SECTION 2. The Street Superintendent of the City of Montebello is hereby directed to cause to be erected adequate warning signs giving due notice of such withdrawal from public access of the said highway. Said signs to be erected at each approach to the same and he shall also cause to be erected at such places as he shall doem advisable notice that the said Bluff Road is not a through street, in order that the general traffic on the said highway may be re-routed away from the said crossing. This withdrawal from the public access shall take effect upon the passage of this Ordinance. (Cont'd on next page)

⁽³⁾ Ordinance No. 266 reads:

During the 12-hour period from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on a recent week-day, 23 trains were operated across Bluff Road, during which time a total of 872 vehicles crossed the railway at Bluff Road. Of these vehicles, 59 consisted of heavy-type trucks, seven of which had trailers attached, and three were tank trucks. Of these trucks, 18, or 30 per cent, were not destined to or did not criginate in the industrial development along Bluff Road, and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it must be assumed were of a through character and would be equally served by crossings at other locations. The record further shows that a total of 270 of the vehicles, or 31 per cent, failed entirely to observe the city's boulevard stop requirement before proceeding across the track.

To the east the motorists' views of approaching trains are unobscured for approximately one-half mile, at which point the railway is curved toward the south. To the west, however, the views are effectively obscured by the banks from which the approach descents have been cut. The record shows that along the read connection it is difficult for vehicles to pass each other; that a tank and trailer, having stepped on the track, would experience a severe pull to ascend on either side; that it would be practically impossible for two such units to pass on the grades, and with a truck stalled on the track, confronted by one from the opposite direction, it would be impossible to clear the track in sufficient time to avoid a wreck.

(3) Cont'd

SECTION 3. This Ordinance is urgently required for the immediate preservation of public health, peace and safety. The following is a specific statement showing the urgency of this Ordinance.

The limited withdrawal of the use of that portion of the said highway defined above from public use is urgently necessary in order to prevent the occurrence of accidents at the intersection of the said street with the said Railway Company's right-of-way and that the immediate taking of effect of this Ordinance is therefore necessary for the preservation of public safety.

SECTION 4. The City Clerk shall certify to the passage of this Ordinance by a vote of four fifths of all members of the City Council of the City of Mentebello and shall cause the same to be published once in the MONTEBELLO MESSENGER, a weekly newspaper of general circulation, published and circulated in the City of Mentebello, and thereupon and thereafter the same shall be in full force and effect.

Adopted and approved the 4th day of April, 1938.

Applicant takes the position that with the railway located in a substantial cut on the west side of Bluff Road and on a fill and treatle immediately to the east, any collision between a train and motor vehicle at Crossing No. 2-150.0 might well result in a tragedy of far-reaching proportions to the public and the railway traffic. The hazard is further accentuated by the severe grades, limited widths, curving alignment, and poor surfacing of the approaches; that ingress and egress to property now served by the crossing at Bluff Road will still be available by other existing highways; that in its opinion there is not sufficient public use of Crossing No. 2-150.0 to warrant its continuation or justify an overpass at separated grades at this time. In the interest of public safety, the applicant has urged that the crossing be abandoned and closed.

Should, however, the city still desire a connection between the sections of Bluff Road on either side of the railway, applicant has suggested a means whereby a connecting road could be constructed to join the existing pavement at points approximately 500 feet beyond the right of way, and, descending along grades of six and seven per cent on a partial fill, cross the track beneath the most westerly span of the railway trestle at a distance less than 200 feet from the existing grade crossing. Applicant has offered the use of its right-of-way and permission to cross beneath its structure for such a grade separation.

Various public witnesses appeared in protest against the discontinuance of a public crossing at Bluff Road unless a suitable substitute was made available. In general, most of the protests were predicated upon an inconvenience which would result to the present establishments and the retarding effect on future development of property. The views of these individuals have been carefully considered by the Commission. The majority of these witnesses, on being questioned, favored some form of crossing at separated grades.

The city of Montebello in these proceedings has freely admitted the existence of an abnormal hazard in the existing design of the grade crossing at Bluff Road and has declared that the passage of Ordinance No. 266 in 1938 was an attempt to escape from liability which might result therefrom. The city contends.

however, that Bluff Road will assume an important position upon the completion of the Santa Ana Froeway and Slauson Avenue, as Slauson Avenue will constitute the only outlet between the city of Mentebelle and points which lie to the south of the freeway.

City police and fire department representatives testified that the Bluff Road crossing is employed to advantage in the functioning of their respective departments.

City representatives contend that there is too much traffic at this time along Bluff Road for the present crossing and, with a substantial increase expected in the future, take the position that it is inadvisable to close the crossing but advisable to remove the hazard. With the object of minimizing expenses, the city has requested that consideration be given to the possibility of a grade crossing with straightened alignment, increased width, and improved grades of appreach, whereby visibility toward the west would be improved by tapering off the sides of the railway cut in the proximity of the crossing. A plan and prefile of this suggested treatment has been received in evidence as Exhibit No. 10.

The Commission's engineer assigned to conduct a study of conditions testified that in his opinion the existing grade crossing at Bluff Road presents a most hazardous situation. Topographical features peculiar to this location combine to establish the setting for a major catastrophe in event of a collision between a train and meter vehicle at Crossing No. 2-150.0. The only effective means of ensuring against such serious consequences would lie in the replacement of the grade crossing with a grade separation structure, or, if the separation were not to be constructed, in the closure and abandonment of the existing grade crossing. From the traffic counts it would be extremely difficult to justify an overpass on the basis of the number of persons to be benefited at this point. In his opinion, the real need for a crossing at Bluff Road is nonexistent and, in the interest of public safety, he recommended that Crossing No. 2-150.0 be closed immediately.

Applicant and the city, after a joint survey, prepared estimates of cost on each of two plans: the first, to construct a new grade crossing in accordance with the alignment and grades shown on Exhibit No. 10, accompanied with a reduction in the heights of banks of the railway cut to the west of the crossing; and the second, to construct a connecting readway routed beneath the west span of the Rio Hende treatle, substantially as suggested on Exhibit No. 2.

In order to obtain a standard clearance of 14 feet beneath the trestle girder it would be necessary to excavate below the ground line between one and two feet for the roadway. This would place its elevation at approximately the same level as that of the stream bed.

In these proceedings, some differences of opinion were expressed as to the practicability of constructing a readway with a portion along the side and at the approximate level of the Rio Hondo stream bed. A witness for the railway testified that such a method appeared practical; the city manager, on the other hand, expressed the belief that such method would not be feasible and he would not recommend the construction to the city unless forced to construct the crossing beneath the trestle. The city engineer testified that unless reinforced-concrete construction were employed along the lower portion within the level of the stream bed, the undercressing would not follow good engineering practice.

The Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army, has informed the Commission (Exhibit No. 13) that the proposed undercrossing will in no way conflict with its plans for the construction of the preposed Rio Hondo flood control channel. The Los Angeles County Flood Control District has indicated that it does not favor use of its right of way for the preposed read, inasmuch as a portion might conflict with a contemplated spreading ground service read and a proposed bridle trail through the westerly span of the treatle (Exhibit No. 14). A review of the record on this phase establishes that the design and construction of the underpass can be made to conform to sound engineering practice without excessive cost.

Considerable oral testimeny by witnesses for both the city and the railway is contained in the record on each of these two plans. In general, the

plum advocated by the city would result in the elimination of the present curves through direct extension of Bluff Road from the south, to connect in a straightened alignment with the existing pavement to the north. The present 11-foot and 13-foot restrictive widths would be overcome through construction of the new crossing to a width of 40 feet throughout. In its new location, approximately 50 feet westerly of Crossing No. 2-150.0, the city engineer testified that a substantial improvement in grades of approach would be secured through use of a six per cent maximum grade for the descent on the south side, level across the track to a point 16 feet north thereof, thence ascend through two reversed vertical curves for 100 feet, and thereafter rise along a grade of approximately 0.8 per cont to join the existing pavement at a point 250 feet farther north. An opening up of advance views of the track to the west was contemplated through removal of the upper portion of the earth from the banks of the railway out and, where necessary, adjacent land. Installation of red signals at the top of the gradeswas included, to be so coordinated with rail operation as to present the stop aspect on a train's approach. The city engineer estimated the cost of such work, exclusive of removal of any railway facilities, installation of railway crossing signal protection, coordination of city signals with train movements, right of way acquisitions, or property damages, to be \$10,300.

In order to compare the estimates of the city and the railway, the items of supervision and contingencies have been removed from railway estimates and, with adjustments made for other items which appeared to have been emitted, the estimates of both the railway and the city, for both the crossing at grade and the underpass, have been tabulated in summary form and introduced in Exhibit No. 12. The Commission's engineer, advising against a grade crossing for Bluff Read, recommended that should a grade crossing be determined upon by the Commission it be afforded the most effective means of automatic crossing signal protection to guard against the extreme hazards presented by the adjacent cut and treatle. An automatic crossing gate and flashing light signal installation accordingly has been included in the estimates for the crossing at grade. When the cest of this

form of protection has been added to the project, together with the estimated cost of relocating the railway facilities, which must include the existing electric power and communication pole lines presently installed upon the tops of banks proposed to be removed, the estimated cost to construct the new crossing at grade, as advocated by the city, is:

Turning now to the estimates for the connection beneath the railway trestle, these are:

The city's cost estimate for a connection beneath the railway trestle was based upon a project 1,500 feet in length to obtain a maximum grade of five per cent on the southern pertion and six per cent on the northern side. The readway was planned to a width of 30 feet, paved with five-inch oil macadam. The 400 feet adjacent to the stream bed was of six-inch reinferced concrete of a 40-feet width. No protection was provided against flood waters in this estimate, but an amount of \$6,000 has been previded for acquisition of property.

The plan by the railway included a length of 1,100 feet, to a width of 22 feet, with grades of approach of six and seven per cent on the south and north descents, respectively. Provision has been made in the railway estimate for the construction of a substantial dike of earthwork and riprap to protect the readway against flood waters of the Rio Hondo.

An amount of \$2,000 has been provided in the estimate for acquisition of property in the summarization of the railway's plan.

Exhibit No. 12 contains an estimate in the amount of \$60,500 for the construction of an overpass for Bluff Road, for comparative purposes, in addition to the estimates for a relocated crossing at grade and an underpass. In this estimate no provision has been made for either supervision or contingencies, and from testimony of record the final cost of such a structure would in all probability exceed the amount of the estimate.

Testimony and cross-examination in connection with the plan and profile (Exhibit No. 10) introduced by the city for construction of Bluff Road at grade indicates that on the approach which would ascend from the track on the north side the two reversed vertical curves would, in themselves, introduce the effect of severe grades. From testimony of record, an avorage grade for a 50-foot course would be 8.6 per cent, 20 feet of which would be in excess of 10 per cent, with a maximum increment at the point of compound of 11.6 per cent.

The record further indicates that with an improvement of the presently restricted connection over the railway, a substantial increase in the volume of venicular traffic, in both automobiles and trucks, can be reasonably expected immediately thereafter.

At Greenwood Avonue, Crossing No. 2-149.5, the record shows the present pavement on either side of the crossing to be 21 feet in width, in good condition, and with three-feet shoulders on either side. Present traffic amounts to approximately 7,600 vehicles in a 24-hour period. The paved portion within the track area and for two feet boyond the rails is approximately 28 feet in width.

Sycamore Street abuts the right of way on the north side and intersects Greenwood Avenue as a street of secondary importance.

Avenue at substantially the same elevation as surrounding property, and train movements are afforded protection by two Standard No. 3 wigwags. Train speeds are mixed, some of which are relatively high. Views of the crossing are good, those in the southwest and southeast quadrants being entirely open, and the remaining two open by the width of Sycamore Street in advance of the railway in addition to incomplete development on the corner properties to the north of Sycamore Street.

The Commission's ongineer, in testifying on conditions at this location, declared that in his opinion the present volume of traffic which uses the Bluff Road crossing might easily be consolidated with that on Greenwood Avenue, with little effect on the traffic flow on the latter street. He testified, however,

that the wigwags were frequently activated by certain trains which, entering the wigwag circuit, consumed substantial time in switching cars to adjacent industries to the west of the crossing before proceeding across Greenwood Avenue. The public using the crossing at those times would note the wigwag operation for long periods without the approach of a train, and attach less significance to the warning aspect. He recommended that, in the interest of public safety, the eastbound approach circuit be provided with a time-out device which would, in the event of industry switching, cause the signals to discontinue operation until such time as the train was ready to continue.

In addition to the time-out device, he recommended that supplementary two-train indicators be provided on the wigwag signals to denote by both audible and visible means the approach of a second train from the opposite direction at those times when such conditions arose. The changes and additions to Greenwood Avenue crossing signals were recommended independently of the final disposition of the Bluff Read proceeding.

A careful review of this record impels the conclusion that conditions at Crossing No. 2-150.0, Bluff Read, constitute an extreme potential hazard which, in the interest of public safety, should be eliminated. The evidence submitted in these proceedings establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that conditions at that point, as they exist today, might readily account for a wreck of tragic proportions should a collision take place at that location.

That the city recognized an undue hazard is evidenced by the passage of Ordinance No. 266, supra (see fectnote 3), which nominally withdrew from public use that pertien of Bluff Read across the railway right of way. It is notable that as of that date (1938), hazardous conditions led to the declaration that such action was "***urgently necessary in order to prevent the occurrence of accidents at the intersection***" and "***necessary for the preservation of public safety."

The record shows that vehicular traffic within two menths of the date of passage of the ordinance consisted of 68 vehicles and 14 trains within a 12-hour period.

Comparable figures today include 872 vehicles and 23 trains, an increase in the incidence of hazard of more than 20 times.

b. Second-train indicators, with both audible and visual warnings to indicate the approach of a second train when one train is already causing operation of the crossing signals.

Circuit plans for the above additions shall be filed with the Commission before commencement of installation. Said additions shall be completed and in operation within ninety (90) days after the effective date of this order, unless further time is granted by subsequent order.

II. The City of Montobello shall institute all necessary steps to legally abandon and effectively close the existing crossing at grade of Bluff Road over the track of The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company (Crossing - No. 2-150.0) in the city of Montobello, within thirty (30) days after the effective date of this order. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company, at its sole expense, shall remove the crossing signals and povement from its right of way within thirty (30) days after the closure of Crossing No. 2-150.0.

This order shall become effective twenty (20) days after the date hereof.

Dated at Sans Francisco., California, this 15th day of

gust . 1950.

Commissioners