

ORIGINAL

Decision No. 59322

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of the Application of SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY for authority to replace crossing flagmen with Standard No. 8 flashing light signals at New Mt. Vernon Avenue (Crossing No. B-539.8) in the City of Colton, County of San Bernardino, State of California.

Application No. 41352

James W. O'Brien, for applicant.
Lyman H. Cozad, for City of Colton; Paul J. Young,
for Colton Chamber of Commerce, protestants.
George P. Zimmerman, for County of San Bernardino
Road Department; Harvey O. Wright, interested
parties.
William F. Hibbard, for the Commission's staff.

O P I N I O N

By the application herein, filed with this Commission on July 29, 1959, applicant seeks authority to replace human flagmen with Standard No. 8 flashing light signals at the New Mt. Vernon Avenue Crossing (Crossing No. B-539.8) in the vicinity of the City of Colton, San Bernardino County, California.

A public hearing on the application was held in Colton, California, on October 7, 1959, before Examiner Kent C. Rogers. Notice of hearing was given to the City of Colton and the County of San Bernardino as required by this Commission.

Exhibit No. 1 herein is a map of the area including the crossing involved. This area contains applicant's Colton general switching yard. Switching movements cannot be made to the west of the crossing for the reason that The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe main line crosses the Southern Pacific tracks at 6th Street. As a

result, switching movements and making up of trains must be effected across New Mt. Vernon Avenue. North of the Southern Pacific tracks, Mt. Vernon Avenue, the extension of New Mt. Vernon Avenue, is a major highway extending approximately five miles from an interchange with the San Bernardino Freeway in the City of Colton to an interchange with U. S. Highway 66 at Highland Avenue in the City of San Bernardino. From the San Bernardino Freeway, New Mt. Vernon Avenue extends southerly as a secondary highway over a somewhat circuitous route approximately one and one-half miles to an interchange with the new Riverside Freeway at Washington Street, and then continues on for another three miles to Palmyrita Avenue in Riverside County.

The crossing is over one main line track, a passing track and four yard tracks. The width of pavement at the crossing is 33 feet and the north and south approach widths are 24 feet and 28 feet, respectively. The approach grades for vehicular traffic are approximately 1.5% ascending from the north and approximately 4.5% ascending from the south. Protection is by two Standard No. 1-B signs, two advance warning signs, and one human flagman with three eight-hour shifts per day. Four floodlights are provided for night illumination.

View conditions depend largely upon the extent and nature of the rail operations at any particular time. If there are no rail movements or cars spotted in the vicinity of the crossing, the view conditions will be reasonably good to the west and fair to the east. When rail operations and switching movements are heavy, the view conditions are poor.

The grade of the tracks across New Mt. Vernon Avenue is .58 of 1% down to the east. Nine hundred feet west of the crossing the grade is reduced to .33 of 1%. East of the crossing the tracks

are level. At the crossing it is 60 feet between the outside rails of the outside tracks. Main line movements are restricted to 30 miles per hour. The speed of movement on other than the main tracks is 10 or 15 miles per hour. The applicant stipulated that it would restrict movements across the highway to 5 miles per hour if the application is granted. Only three tracks, including the main line, can be occupied at any one time across the highway. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway and Union Pacific tracks cross the main line involved at 6th Street. This prohibits the diversion of all switching movements to points west of the crossing.

Traffic Count

In an average 24-hour period there are approximately 1,955 vehicles using New Mt. Vernon Avenue across the tracks, and 312 train movements. Of these train movements, approximately 29 are through movements at 30 miles per hour, and the majority of the balance are switching movements (Exhibit No. 5). No use is being presently made of the Pacific Fruit Corporation's sidings and attempts are being made to transfer the property. A transfer could result in more switching movements.

An associate transportation engineer checked delays resulting from train movements during a 14-hour period (7 a.m. to 9 p.m.) when vehicular and rail movements were heaviest. From this check he made the following estimates of delays resulting from the various types of protection:

	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Hours</u>
(1) Length of time crossing blocked by actual rail movement	192	3.2
(2) Length of time crossing blocked by rail movements with human flagman	226	3.8
(3) Length of time crossing would be blocked by Standard No. 8 flashing light signals with timing-out circuits giving 20 seconds advance warning	259	4.3
(4) Length of time crossing would be blocked by Standard No. 8 flashing light signals supplemented with automatic gates with timing-out and selective-speed circuits.	285	4.7

The figures above show that the installation of flashing light signals would increase the present delay time by 33 minutes or 14.6% during the period checked. The installation of gates would increase the delay time by 59 minutes, or 26.1%. Allegedly, the principal reason for the substantial increase in delays by either plan is the fact that the human flagmen do not presently give the minimum 20 seconds advance warning time that is required for the operation of automatic signals by General Order No. 75-B.

Accident Record

The evidence shows that during the year 1955 and thereafter to the date of the hearing, there have been seven accidents at the crossing resulting in injuries to two persons and no deaths. The applicant's witness stated that the accident rate is higher at this crossing than at similar crossings. The witness stated that in his opinion Standard No. 8 flashing light signals afford better protection to the public than a human flagman, but less protection than crossing gates. It was the opinion of the staff witness that the installation of Standard No. 8 flashing light signals would substantially increase the hazard of the crossing and would not be adequate protection, but the installation of Standard No. 8 flashing

light signals supplemented with automatic gates would reduce the present hazards and provide adequate protection, but would increase the delay at the crossing.

Comparisons of Costs

Although the applicant requests authority only to eliminate the human flagmen and substitute therefor two Standard No. 8 flashing light signals, it presented studies showing comparisons of the costs of these two types of protection plus protection by Standard No. 8 flashing light signals with automatic gates (Exhibits Nos. 2, 4 and 7). It did not capitalize the cost of flagmen. The staff estimated the cost of the flagmen and the two types of crossing protection and, in addition, capitalized the expense of the flagmen and estimated the cost of a grade separation. The estimates, in so far as they cover the same items, are approximately the same. The staff's estimates are as follows:

Item	Instal- lation	Annual Mainten- ance	Installation Plus Maintenance Amortized at 5%
Human Flagmen	-	\$20,000	\$400,000
No. 8 Flashing Light Signals with timing-out circuits	\$22,550	816	38,870
No. 8 Flashing Light Signals with timing-out and selective-speed circuits	25,550	831	42,170
No. 8 Flashing Light Signals with automatic gates, timing-out and selective-speed circuits.	\$2,700	1,321	59,120
Grade Separation	400,000	-	400,000

Public Witnesses

Although the crossing is not presently in the City of Colton, the city manager thereof appeared in opposition to the change of protection. He stated that there is presently in the City of

Colton another crossing protected by human flagmen, and he believed such protection is better than any automatic protection. He also stated that there is a possibility of a large industrial development west of Mountain View and south of the tracks and that New Mt. Vernon Avenue is the only access to this area. He recommended that the human flagmen be retained at the crossing. A representative of the Colton Chamber of Commerce supported the city manager's views.

An assistant road commissioner of the San Bernardino County Road Department opposed the request. He testified that the Road Department opposes flashing lights or gates at the crossing as constituting poor public relations and that the county has a master plan of highways which contemplates improving New Mt. Vernon Avenue as a four-lane major highway.

Staff Recommendation

The staff studied the proposal and concluded that the installation of Standard No. 8 flashing light signals would substantially increase the hazards and that the installation of Standard No. 8 flashing light signals supplemented by automatic gates would reduce the hazards and provide adequate protection but would increase the delays. It recommended that if the Commission finds it to be in the public interest to permit the company to make the savings indicated by the elimination of the human flagmen, the order should require in lieu thereof that the crossing should be protected by Standard No. 8 flashing light signals supplemented with crossing gates and equipped with suitable timing-out and selective-speed circuits.

Conclusion

From the record herein it appears that use of the crossing is in a state of change and that the territory surrounding in a state of probable growth and expansion. The volume of train traffic to be

expected is uncertain, and the volume of vehicular traffic to be expected, whether increasing or diminishing, is unknown. The actual annual cost to applicant of maintaining the flagman is greater than the annual maintenance costs of any type of automatic protection. On the other hand, the record shows that traffic is delayed less with the human flagmen than it would be with any type of automatic protection and that the human flagmen provide better protection than would the Standard No. 8 flashing light signals proposed by the company. In our opinion, the existing protection should be retained for the present at New Mt. Vernon Avenue crossing (Crossing No. B-539.8) and it will be so ordered. The application will be denied.

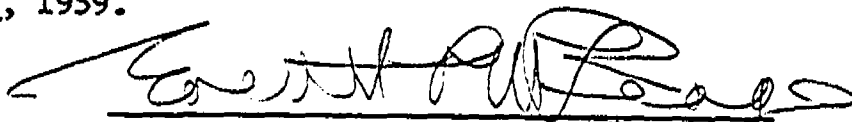
ORDER

An application having been filed, a public hearing having been held thereon, the Commission having found that applicant should continue the existing protection at the New Mt. Vernon Avenue crossing (Crossing No. B-539.8),

IT IS ORDERED that the above-entitled application be, and it hereby is, denied.

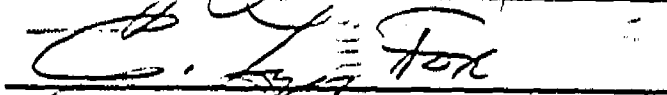
The effective date of this order shall be twenty days after the date hereof.

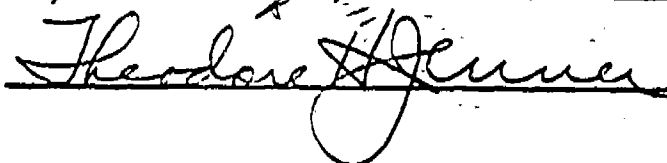
Dated at San Francisco, California, this 1st day of December, 1959.



President







Commissioners

Commissioner Peter E. Mitchell, being necessarily absent, did not participate
-7- in the disposition of this proceeding.