

**ORIGINAL**Decision No. 70646

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Investigation into the status, safety, )  
 maintenance, use and protection or )  
 closing of the following crossings of )  
 the Southern Pacific Company in the )  
 City of Santa Fe Springs: Crossings )  
 Nos. BK-501.7, BKA-499.0, BKA-499.1. )

Case No. 8264

Randolph Karr and Walt A. Steiger, by Walt A. Steiger, for Southern Pacific Company;  
William Camil, for City of Santa Fe Springs;  
 respondents.  
G. R. Mitchell, for Brotherhood of Locomotive  
 Engineers, interested party.  
Elmer S. Jostrom and W. F. Hibbard, for the  
 Commission staff.

O P I N I O N

This proceeding is an investigation by the Commission on its own motion into the status, safety, maintenance, use and protection or closing of three crossings of Southern Pacific Company (SP) in the City of Santa Fe Springs (City), namely, Crossing No. BK-501.7 (Alondra Boulevard), Crossing No. BKA-499.0 (Florence Avenue) and Crossing No. BKA-499.1 (Pioneer Boulevard).

The purposes of the investigation, as set forth in the Order Instituting Investigation are to determine:

1. Whether or not the public health, safety and welfare require relocation, widening, closing or other alteration of said crossings or require installation and maintenance of additional or improved protective devices at said crossings;
2. Whether, if any of the above should be done, on what terms such shall be done, and to make such apportionment of costs among the affected parties as may appear just and reasonable;

3. Whether any other order or orders that may be appropriate in the lawful exercise of the Commission's jurisdiction should be issued.

By said order, SP and City are made respondents in the proceeding.

Public hearing was held before Examiner Bishop at Los Angeles on November 16, 1965. Evidence was presented by the Commission's staff, SP, the City and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

Alondra Boulevard

An associate transportation engineer from the Commission's staff testified concerning his study of this crossing. From his presentation and that of the director of public works of the City of Santa Fe Springs the following facts were disclosed:

This crossing is located on the Santa Ana Branch of SP a short distance west of the Alondra Boulevard overpass of Santa Ana Freeway. The railroad, being parallel to the freeway, crosses Alondra on the diagonal, northwesterly and southeasterly.<sup>1/</sup>

A 1965 traffic count showed 9,200 vehicles per day using the crossing. According to the aforesaid director, this represents an increase of approximately 7,000 vehicles in the last two or three years.

Fourteen trains per day pass over the crossing, all of which are freight trains. There is one through train in each direction. The remainder are engaged in switching operations.

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<sup>1/</sup> Between said crossing and the freeway overpass Marquardt Avenue extends southerly from Alondra. It crosses the Santa Ana Branch at grade a short distance south of Alondra. That grade crossing is outside the limits of Santa Fe Springs and is not here in issue.

Maximum permissible speeds over the crossing are 30 and 45 miles per hour for trains and highway vehicles, respectively.

The present protection at the crossing consists of two Standard No. 8 flashing light signals.

Visibility of southbound trains approaching the crossing is restricted by buildings, fences, and vehicle parking north of the crossing and adjacent to the railroad right-of-way. The view to the south is unrestricted for the eastbound driver but from the opposite direction is partially restricted by an industrial property and by freight cars on a siding. For westbound drivers, the approach to the crossing is obscured by the elevated overpass of the intervening Santa Ana freeway and, at certain times of the year, by the setting sun. A further hazard in the approach from the east is due to the narrowing of the pavement from four lanes to two lanes between the aforesaid Marquardt Avenue and the crossing area, by reason of which two lanes of westbound traffic are forced into one lane just prior to crossing the railroad. The staff engineer also noted overactivation of the flashing light signals at the crossing, caused by switching operations in the vicinity.

During the five<sup>2</sup>-year period preceding the date of the hearing there had been five accidents at the Alondra crossing. The first of these, on September 15, 1960 resulted in a fatality. In each of the next three accidents there was an injury, and in the last (January 8, 1965) only property damage.

The staff witness recommended that:

- (a) The Alondra crossing and approaches thereto be widened to the ultimate width of 80 feet, from Marquardt Avenue on the east to a point approximately 500 feet west

of the crossing, and two center islands be constructed suitable for installing Standard No. 8 flashing lights with automatic gates; cost of widening the pavement and constructing the islands to be borne by the city; cost of preparing the track to receive paving in the portion of the street to be widened to be borne by SP.

(b) The existing Standard No. 8 flashing lights be relocated at their new curb locations, two additional Standard No. 8 flashing lights be installed on the center islands, the flashing light signals to be supplemented with automatic gates, and the automatic crossing protection be controlled by adequate electronic devices to eliminate overactivation; the entire installation cost under this paragraph to be apportioned 50 percent to SP and 50 percent to the city.

SP's assistant division engineer testified that the estimated installation cost of the increased protection recommended by the staff for the Alondra crossing is \$16,550. This does not include any of the cost of the recommended improvements embraced by paragraph (a), above. Annual maintenance cost was estimated at \$840.

The staff engineer had based his recommendation for the widening of Alondra to 80 feet on his understanding that City planned to do this, in any event, in about four years. The director testified that the widening of Alondra is far down on City's priority list of proposed street improvements and that, because of the greater urgency of other projects, it would be four or five years before the widening of Alondra could be commenced. It appears also that City does not have title to the

land which would be involved in the widening of Alondra to 80 feet for the staff-recommended distance of 500 feet west of the crossing. Acquisition costs would be involved as well as the cost of paving.<sup>2/</sup> The director agreed that when the street is widened additional protection will be needed at the crossing here in issue. It was his opinion that no additional protection should be required at said crossing at the present time, but that if the Commission should order the installation of crossing gates said improvement should be accomplished without widening the pavement and without changing the locations of the present flashing light signals.<sup>3/</sup>

The chairman of the California State Legislative Board of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, an interested party in this proceeding, testified concerning the need for improved protection at the Alondra crossing. He had personally observed, on several occasions, vehicular traffic at said crossing when trains were approaching. His observation, both at this crossing and many others, disclosed that where crossing gates are not provided, even though flashing light signals are in operation, drivers take chances in crossing in front of an approaching train and there are many near-misses. It is the position of his organization, he said, that crossing gates should be installed at the Alondra crossing to eliminate this hazard.

It is apparent from the record that the staff recommendation that Alondra be widened to the full width of 80 feet concurrently with the installation of improved crossing protection

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<sup>2/</sup> According to an exhibit introduced by the director, the cost of land acquisition, engineering and construction of the widened highway was estimated at \$165,330.

<sup>3/</sup> The staff witness expressed the opinion that even if City was unable currently to widen Alondra, crossing gates should be installed.

is simply designed to accomplish now in the way of street improvements in the vicinity of, and over the crossing what City intends to do at a later date. However, the record also discloses that the acquisition by City of the property necessary for such widening would place a burden on the municipality which it is not now prepared to assume, and which public safety does not appear to require at this time.

We find that:

1. Public safety, convenience and necessity require that the Alondra Boulevard crossing here in issue (Crossing No. BK-501.7) be improved by supplementing the existing Standard No. 8 flashing light signals with automatic gates, the automatic protection to be controlled by adequate electronic devices to eliminate over-activation.

2. The cost of installation and maintenance of said improved protection should be apportioned as follows: 50 percent to Southern Pacific Company and 50 percent to the City of Santa Fe Springs.

Florence Avenue and  
Pioneer Boulevard

Studies of these two crossings also were made by the aforesaid staff engineer. His presentation and that of the director of public works of the City of Santa Fe Springs disclosed the following facts: These crossings are close together, being located near the intersection of Florence Avenue and Pioneer Boulevard. The crossings are over SP's Puente Branch. Approaching from the northeast, that branch crosses Pioneer Boulevard diagonally a short distance north of the aforesaid intersection, then crosses Florence Avenue, also diagonally, a short distance west of the intersection.

A March 1965 traffic count showed 6,800 and 13,000 vehicles per day passing over the Pioneer and Florence crossings, respectively. According to the director the volume had increased in the last two years by possibly 5,500 vehicles over the Pioneer crossing and by approximately 2,000 vehicles over the Florence crossing. The maximum permissible speed over both crossings is 35 miles per hour.

Approximately 16 trains per day pass over these crossings. They are all local or through freight trains or light engines, originating or terminating at Los Nietos yard, which is north of Santa Fe Springs. All trains are restricted to a maximum speed of 30 miles per hour over the Pioneer and Florence crossings.

At present, each of the crossings is protected by four Standard No. 8 flashing light signals, two of which are mounted on concrete center islands. Both thoroughfares are paved to their maximum widths over the crossings. The signals are controlled by integrated circuits so that they operate as a unit. Traffic signals at the nearby intersection of Pioneer and Florence are also connected with the crossing signal circuits so that when a train approaches, the operation of said traffic signals is preempted by the crossing signal circuits.

Visibility of approaching trains at the Pioneer crossing is restricted in three quadrants. The fact that the rail line approaches the crossing from the north on a curve contributes to this circumstance. Visibility of southbound trains approaching the Florence crossing is obscured for eastbound drivers.

Another hazard at these crossings, the staff engineer testified, is found in the problem of distinguishing the railroad

flashing lights from the intersection traffic signals at night when the latter, having been preempted by the track circuits, are flashing red. Confusion is experienced he said because of the elevation of the track, two to three feet above the general road surface, and the short distances between the crossings and the aforesaid intersection.

During the period from January 1, 1960 to the date of the hearing in this matter there was one accident at the Pioneer Boulevard crossing, resulting in property damage only. During the same period there were three accidents at the Florence Avenue crossing. The first, in 1962, resulted in property damage; the second, in 1964, involved one injured person; while the third, on January 1, 1965, resulted in one fatality and in injuries to another person.

The staff witness recommended that the existing Standard No. 8 flashing light signals at the Pioneer and Florence crossings be supplemented with automatic gates; that the automatic protection at said crossings be controlled by adequate electronic devices to eliminate overactivation; and that the cost of the entire installation be apportioned 50 percent to SP and 50 percent to City.

The SP witness recommended that the gates be double crossing gates, that is, operating both from the center island and from the side of the road for each direction of traffic. His estimate of costs of installing gates and predictor controls was predicated on that recommendation. He pointed out that the total cost of installing the improved protection at the two crossings in question would be less than might normally be expected because the crossings are sufficiently close together



to be operated by unified controls. The cost of installing the gates and predictor controls was estimated by this witness to be \$20,740 at the Pioneer crossing and \$20,960 at the Florence crossing. Annual maintenance cost was estimated at \$1,008 for each crossing.

The director of public works was of the opinion that, considering the overall traffic control needs of City and the funds available, no additional protection should be required at either the Pioneer crossing or the Florence crossing at the present time.

The position of the participating railroad employees' organization with respect to the Alondra crossing, as hereinabove set forth, also related to the Pioneer and Florence crossings.

The record shows heavy increases in vehicular traffic over these adjacent crossings in the past two years. Testimony of the witnesses also reveals an expected continued upward trend in that traffic. These circumstances, together with the hazards existing by reason of the close configuration of the two thoroughfares and the railroad, and created by the restricted view of approaching trains, demonstrate the need for additional protection at the crossings in question.

We further find that:

3. Public safety, convenience and necessity require that the Pioneer Boulevard crossing (Crossing No. BKA-499.1) and the Florence Avenue crossing (Crossing No. BKA-499.0) here in issue be improved by supplementing the existing Standard No. 8 flashing light signals with double automatic crossing gates, as hereinabove described by SP's assistant division engineer, said automatic

protection to be controlled by adequate electronic devices to eliminate overactivation.

4. The cost of installation and maintenance of said improved protection should be apportioned as follows: 50 percent to Southern Pacific Company and 50 percent to the City of Santa Fe Springs.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. Southern Pacific Company shall, within six months after the effective date of this order, improve the protection of the crossing of Alondra Boulevard, No. BK-501.7, with its Santa Ana Branch by supplementing the existing Standard No. 8 flashing light signals with automatic gates, the automatic protection to be controlled by adequate electronic devices to eliminate overactivation.

2. Southern Pacific Company shall, within six months after the effective date of this order, improve the protection of the crossings of Pioneer Boulevard and Florence Avenue, Nos. BKA-499.1 and BKA-499.0, respectively, by supplementing the existing Standard No. 8 flashing light signals with double automatic crossing gates as hereinbefore described, the automatic protection to be controlled by adequate electronic devices to eliminate overactivation.

3. The installation costs of said protective devices specified in numbered paragraphs 1 and 2 of this order shall be apportioned as follows: 50 percent to Southern Pacific Company and 50 percent to the City of Santa Fe Springs.

4. The maintenance costs for said automatic protective devices specified in numbered paragraphs 1 and 2 of this order shall be apportioned in the same manner as the installation costs are ordered to be apportioned in numbered paragraph 3, pursuant to the provisions of Section 1202.2 of the Public Utilities Code.

5. Within thirty days after the completion of the work pursuant to the first two numbered paragraphs of this order Southern Pacific Company shall so advise the Commission in writing.

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

Dated at San Francisco, California, this 3rd day of MAY, 1966.

Frederick B. Hall  
President

George H. Drove

August

William W. Bennett  
Commissioners