

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

SAFETY DIVISION  
Railroad Safety Branch

RESOLUTION SR-43  
October 21, 1992

RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION SR-43. ORDER LIFTING TRAIN SPEED RESTRICTION OF 60 MILES PER HOUR ON LINES OF SOUTHERN PACIFIC TRANSPORTATION COMPANY IN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AREA OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY, ORIGINALLY ORDERED BY THE COMMISSION AUGUST 28, 1962.

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SUMMARY

Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC), acting on behalf of Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA), requests that a 60 mile per hour (mph) train speed restriction dating from 1962 be lifted. The restriction applies in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles County. After extensive reconstruction of track, bridges, signals, and grade crossings the new SCRRA commuter rail service through the valley is scheduled to begin in October 1992. Applicable Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Track Safety Standards would allow a maximum of 79 mph on sections of these lines. Lifting the 60 mph speed restriction would place the San Fernando Valley trackage under regulations in effect on passenger main lines elsewhere in California and the United States. The Commission staff recommends that the request be granted.

BACKGROUND

Decision (D.) 64180 in Case (C.) 7406 was an interim decision in an investigation of grade crossings over Southern Pacific Transportation Company (SPT) railroad lines in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles County. D.64180 imposed a 35 mph speed limit over some grade crossings until automatic flashing light signals with gates were installed. These were placed in service during 1963 through 1966 and the 35 mph restrictions lifted under the ordering language of D.64180.

D.64180 also imposed a 60 mph train speed limit throughout the valley. Two of the valley's three railroad lines, SPT's Coast and Saugus main lines, have sections originally designed for train speeds in excess of 60 mph. The Saugus line passes through the City of Los Angeles and the City of San Fernando, while the Coast line passes through the City of Los Angeles. These two cities, the state Department of Public Works (Division of Highways), and various civic groups were parties to C.7406.

SPT apparently expressed no objection to the 60 mph speed restriction. It began on SPT operations in the valley August 28, 1962, the effective date of D.64180. Later, operation of

intercity passenger trains along the Coast line by the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) were also affected by the restriction.

In October 1990 the Los Angeles - San Diego Rail Corridor Agency (LOSSAN) requested investigation of Southern California train speed restrictions by staff of Safety Division, Railroad Safety Branch, Traffic Engineering Section. Staff research disclosed no order or resolution affecting the San Fernando Valley speed restriction in the intervening 30 years. No evidence of a violation or complaint of a violation of the restriction has been found. There is no evidence of any earlier request to lift the speed restriction.

After voter approval of Propositions 116 and 108 and passage of Senate Bill 1402 (Public Utilities Code §§130450 - 130455) in 1990 LACTC and transportation agencies of four adjacent counties created the SCRRA to build and operate a commuter rail system over existing railroad rights-of-way, including SPT's Coast and Saugus lines in the San Fernando Valley. LACTC staff inquired how the speed restriction could be lifted. After review of SCRRA's plans to extensively reconstruct and upgrade these lines the Commission staff agreed that the speed restriction could be lifted without compromising safety and recommended that LACTC, with the concurrence of the Cities of Los Angeles and San Fernando, request by letter a resolution lifting the restriction. The state Department of Transportation and SPT are already on record as endorsing lifting of the restriction.

LACTC, acting on behalf of SCRRA, made its request September 22, 1992. It requests that the speed restriction be lifted before October 26, 1992, the date revenue service begins on its "Metrolink" commuter rail system. Amtrak will operate Metrolink trains through the San Fernando Valley over rights-of-way shared by SPT and SCRRA. LACTC sent letters proposing lifting of the restriction to the City of San Fernando and the City of Los Angeles.

#### DISCUSSION

LACTC requests that the 60 mph train speed restriction of D.64180 be lifted.

Approval of the request would subject train operations on the Coast and Saugus lines to the same FRA train speed restrictions in force on other intercity and commuter passenger railroad lines in California and the United States. FRA has safety standards for roadbed, track curvature and geometry, track structure and rail identified in its Track Safety Standards. FRA also has signal and operating equipment safety standards which affect maximum train speeds. FRA's safety program is enforced by certified state and Federal inspectors; in California the state inspectors are employees of the Commission. The FRA program was not in effect when D.64180 was approved.

FRA regulations set maximum speeds. In most cases trains operate under these speeds. For example, the Saugus line, under the FRA maximum of 79 mph, would actually have average Metrolink train speeds of 37 mph with a top speed of 70 mph in some locations. Without the increased speed authorized by this resolution, Metrolink train speeds would average under 30 mph for the Saugus line commute.

SCRRA has contracted for over \$47 million in new track, bridge and signal work (including grade crossing protection) on the two lines involved. SCRRA's Metrolink will, beginning October 1992, provide an alternative for motorists dependent upon Southern California's freeways. Improved home-to-work travel times, reduced traffic, and reduced automotive air pollution are expected benefits. Success will depend on SCRRA's ability to provide a safe service with timely and consistent arrival and departure times.

When service begins Metrolink trains, Amtrak intercity passenger trains and SPT freight train movements will be protected through most of the valley under SPT's Direct Traffic Control. Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) will protect train movements east of Burbank Junction. SCRRA has contracted with SPT to install CTC through the valley to Ventura and Santa Clarita. Operation under both control systems will be in accordance with state and Federal regulations.

The Commission staff recommends that this request be granted. Staff has reviewed SCRRA's plans and believes lifting the 60 mph speed limit will not compromise safety.

To allow testing of Metrolink equipment at revenue service speeds before initiation of service on October 26, 1992, LACTC requests that the removal of the speed restriction be effective immediately.

#### FINDINGS

1. LACTC, acting on behalf of SCRRA, requested September 22, 1992 that a 60 mph SPT train speed limit in the San Fernando Valley be lifted.
2. The 60 mph train speed restriction began August 28, 1962, as ordered by D.64180 in C.7406.
3. SCRRA has extensively improved track, bridges and signals (including grade crossing protection) on the two lines involved.
4. SCRRA's Metrolink will provide an alternative for motorists dependent upon Southern California's freeways.
5. Improved home-to-work travel times, reduced traffic, and reduced automotive air pollution are expected benefits.

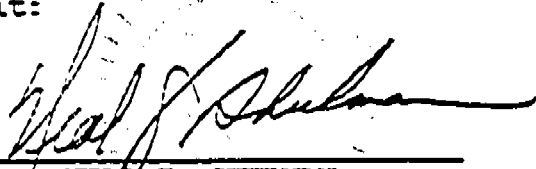
6. A timely and safe Metrolink service, with reliable arrival and departure times, requires some train operations in excess of 60 mph.
7. Metrolink operations will be in conformance with the same state and Federal railroad safety standards in effect on other passenger main lines in California and the United States.
8. Lifting of the 60 mph speed restriction will not compromise safety of Metrolink's operations.
9. Public convenience and safety require lifting of the speed restriction.
10. SCRRA desires to initiate revenue service over the Coast and Saugus main lines on October 26, 1992.
11. The Cities of Los Angeles and San Fernando have expressed no opposition to the increased speeds.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The 60 mph train speed restriction of ordering paragraph 2, Decision 64180, in Case 7406, is lifted.

The effective date of this Resolution is today.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted by the Public Utilities Commission at its regular meeting on October 21, 1992. The following Commissioners approved it:



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NEAL J. SHULMAN  
Executive Director

DANIEL Wm. FESSLER  
President  
JOHN B. OHANIAN  
PATRICIA M. ECKERT  
NORMAN D. SHUMWAY  
Commissioners