

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

SAFETY AND ENFORCEMENT DIVISION
Railroad Safety Branch

RESOLUTION SR-84
March 13, 1996
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R E S O L U T I O N

RESOLUTION SR-84. GRANTING A VARIANCE FROM SIDE CLEARANCE REQUIREMENTS OF COMMISSION GENERAL ORDER 26-D FOR NEW PASSENGER SPUR TRACK AND PLATFORM IN FRESNO, CALIFORNIA, FOR USE OF PASSENGER TRAINS ONLY.

SUMMARY

By letter dated January 30, 1996, the City of Fresno requests a variance from the "horizontal clearance criteria associated with freight train use" for application to the south side of a passenger loading platform to be built adjacent to a new railroad siding for the exclusive use of passenger trains (Siding 2). This track and platform will serve a reconstructed Amtrak depot in downtown Fresno, relocated 200 feet south of its present location.

According to the request and information developed by our staff from a meeting with the County of Fresno, Public Works and Development Services Department, on February 20, 1996:

- o The platform will be 18 inches above top of rail (ATR), 5 feet 4 inches from the center line of track (C/L), and 435 feet long.
- o The platform will be served by passenger trains only on Siding 2, with 435 feet of tangent track--accommodating a six- or seven-car train.
- o Siding 2 will be equipped with dual control switches at both ends. Centralized Traffic Control rules will govern the use of the siding under the control of the train dispatcher.
- o Siding 2 and its platform will be owned by the City of Fresno.
- o Siding 2 will not clear freight trains (platform is 5 feet 4 inches from C/L whereas freight cars are typically 5 feet 5 inches from C/L). By railroad operating notice and dispatcher rules, no freight train will be diverted to Siding 2 under any circumstance.

- o Siding 2's platform--at 18" ATR and 3" from "California Car" doors--will enable boarding of wheel chair passengers directly without having to be lifted with a special apparatus or platform.
- o Siding 2 will be activated for the preferred loading platform unless two trains are scheduled at the station simultaneously. Then passengers for the second train will be diverted by underground tunnel to Siding 1. (Loading wheel chairs onto Siding 1 will require the usual lifts from its 8" ATR platform).
- o The standards for Siding 2 and its platform are the same as those used in the exclusively passenger Northeast Corridor by Amtrak.

The letter for waiver, dated January 30, 1996, from Raymond Salazar, Public Works Director, City of Fresno, references clearances for freight train use (General Order 26-D, Section 3). Since no freight trains will be permitted on Siding 2, freight train standards would not be applicable, but instead those of Section 9, referencing "Railroads and Street Railroads Not Transporting Freight Cars." Section 9 provides that the minimum side clearance for passenger equipment at rail height be no closer than 30 inches from the side of the widest equipment operated. Since Siding 2 will be as close as three inches from California Cars, the variance request is appropriate.

The United Transportation Union (UTU) has been furnished a copy of this request and, according to applicant, "UTU would not have an objection to the level boarding platform at the Fresno station." However, by letter to the Commission staff, dated February 20, 1996, Mr. Jones suggests that this matter be held in abeyance until he has accomplished an on-site inspection of the proposed siding and platform. By telephone conversation with Mr. Jones on February 22, 1996, staff developed that UTU does not oppose the installation in concept, but wants assurances that Santa Fe and Amtrak dispatching procedures and operating rules render its implementation safe for his constituents. Under the circumstances, there is no reason to delay construction authorization. We will nonetheless impose a requirement for staff to develop a consensus on operational safety--to include UTU representation--before Siding 2 can be activated. Since UTU's concerns can be addressed subsequent to the start of construction, we will not delay authorization of the variance.

The Commission, therefore, finds that the various request should be granted, subject to the restrictions noted below.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that the requested authority is hereby granted subject to the following conditions:

1. Freight trains shall not be permitted to enter or occupy Siding 1 with its adjacent 18" ATR passenger platform.
2. Burlington Northern Santa Fe shall issue appropriate instructions to its train crews and require its dispatchers to absolutely prohibit freight train from occupying Siding 2.
3. Freight clearance dimensions shall be maintained adjacent to Siding 1 (GO 26-D, 3.2) at all times.
4. The Commission staff shall meet with the railroad and representatives of the United Transportation Union to reach consensus on operational safety. Issues to be resolved will include movement of other trains when a passenger train is stopped at Siding 1 or 2, safe mixture of freight and passenger traffic on the complement of tracks at Fresno, and safe dispatching procedures.

This resolution is effective today.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted by the Public Utilities Commission at its regular meeting on MARCH 13, 1996. The following Commissioners approved it:

Wesley Franklin

WESLEY M. FRANKLIN
Executive Director

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