



# Why trains whistle

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*Urban and rural development across Canada brings many benefits, but it can also bring people in closer contact with trains. When that happens, people living adjacent to railway operations sometimes hear noise associated with trains, such as whistling. This is especially true during summer months when windows are open and people spend more time outside.*

*This pamphlet answers commonly asked questions about why trains whistle, and describes the process to follow when a community decides it no longer wants trains to whistle in its jurisdiction.*

### Why do trains whistle?

Train whistles are safety devices that alert motorists and pedestrians to the presence of an approaching train. They also warn trespassers away from the rail right-of-way.

Locomotive engineers follow a detailed set of instructions in the Canadian Rail Operating Rules (CROR) that outline when a whistle must be sounded and the whistling sequence to be used.

The CROR specify that all trains must sound their whistle one quarter of a mile before all public crossings regardless of the type of crossing warning system in place. This may be reduced to 20 seconds of warning where train speeds are 44 mph or less. In either case, the whistle must be sounded while approaching the crossing and until the train has fully occupied the crossing.

### Who regulates train whistling?

The Canadian Rail Operating Rules were approved by Transport Canada in accordance with the *Railway Safety Act*. As a federally-regulated railway, CN complies with the Act and Transport Canada rules and regulations.

## Why do some trains whistle very loudly, and others not?

Locomotive whistles are manufactured to meet sound level and tone requirements specified in US Federal Railroad Administration regulations and Transport Canada's *Railway Locomotive Inspection and Safety Rules*. The whistles on all locomotives manufactured since 1982 are pushbutton controlled to provide a consistent sound level. However, local weather conditions and wind direction can affect how the sound of the whistle is heard.

The Use of whistles is monitored by management in order to ensure compliance.

## What's the process for implementing an anti-whistling bylaw?

- In certain circumstances, specific public crossings may be exempted from the requirement to whistle. The steps for requesting whistling exemption at a CN crossing are as follows:
- The municipality should first undertake its own review to ensure that the location in question qualifies for a whistle cessation under Transport Canada's Grade Crossings Regulations and Grade Crossing Standards. A copy of these regulations and standards can be obtained from Transport Canada's website

[http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/railsafety/men\\_u.htm](http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/railsafety/men_u.htm)

- The municipality should ensure that the location meets the requirements. If all requirements are met, the municipality submits a detailed request to CN describing existing conditions in the vicinity of the crossing.
- A detailed investigation and report on existing conditions at the site should then be prepared by a professional engineer on behalf of the municipality. This report should include information on existing warning systems, traffic density, sight lines, adjacent public-use buildings and evidence of trespassing problems. The report will also include an assessment of the potential public safety impact should trains cease whistling.
- The railway will review the report. The railway may determine that additional warning systems are necessary before a whistle cessation can be implemented. In some locations, chainlink fencing and a pedestrian over/underpass may also be required.
- The municipality is responsible for the cost of installing and maintaining any additional safety measures including warning systems required to eliminate whistling.

The railway is responsible for installing any additional warning systems.

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When the municipality and the railway agree that the crossing meets the requirements of the Grade Crossings Regulations and Standards and the funding is in place for any additional safety measures, the municipality must notify all relevant associations or organizations and issue a public notice of its intention to pass a resolution prohibiting whistling at the location under review.

- When the resolution is passed and the appropriate safety measures have been put into place, the railway will then issue a bulletin to its train crews advising them not to sound their whistle at that location. These instructions are then incorporated into the railway's official operating timetable.
- The Railway will also notify the municipality and Transport Canada of the implementation of whistle cessation at the crossing.

## How long does the process take?



Depending on the characteristics of the crossing under review and whether additional safety measures are required, the process can take between six months and a year.

### **For more information**

The railway safety branch of Transport Canada can provide details of the regulations governing railway safety, and the anti-whistling implementation process. You can reach them at 613-998-2985 or 1-844-897-7245.

When a municipality has conducted its review based on Transport Canada's whistling exemption guidelines, and wishes to proceed with a formal review of crossing conditions and exemption possibilities, they should contact CN.

