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City Council commits funding for I-25, quiet zone

Councilors committed \$2 million for north interstate improvements, \$1.5 million for train improvements to create quiet zone, contingent on grant funding

By Saja Hindi

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An engineer adjusts switches Wednesday afternoon so a train leaving the Great Western Railway yard can cross Monroe Avenue just south of East 11th Street. The Federal Railroad Commission is asking for public input until July 5 on train horn noise. The city of Loveland is also applying for a federal grant to create a quiet zone for its trains on BNSF tracks. (Michael Brian / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

Loveland city councilors committed \$3.5 million Tuesday to north Interstate 25 improvements and a quiet zone for train horn noise over a three-year period to be spent if federal grant applications are successful.

I-25 Funding

City councilors increased the proposed \$1 million amount committed for I-25 to \$2 million, over three fiscal years, after an amendment by Councilor Dave Clark, by a unanimous 7-0 vote (Councilors Hugh McKean and Troy Krenning were absent).

The money would go toward a local match for a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, TIGER, grant that the North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization is applying for and a Fostering Advancements in Shipping and Transportation for the Long-term Achievement of National Efficiencies grant, FASTLANE, that the Colorado Department of Transportation is applying for.

The estimated cost is \$230 million in interim improvements for the first phase of the 2035 project plan — three lanes in each direction of north I-25 from Colo. 14 in Fort Collins to Colo. 402 in the southern part of Loveland, as well as bridge and infrastructure improvements.

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Colorado Department of Transportation officials were seeking commitments from local governments for the local match.

Larimer County has already committed \$10 million, along with its municipalities, from the road and bridge mill levy fund. The city of Fort Collins has committed \$2 million over a two-year period. Other municipalities and Weld County, as well as developer McWhinney, have been approached but have not yet committed funding.

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While other communities' contributions were a concern to both Mayor Cecil Gutierrez and Councilor Joan Shaffer at the [March 22](#)

http://www.reporterherald.com/news/loveland-local-news/ci_29673378/loveland-city-council-consider-additional-funding-i-25 City Council meeting, Gutierrez said Tuesday that councilors have to be careful about what they say about other communities — some have expressed support but just haven't committed funding yet.

"If we get this project, we're going to get this \$230 million project for a few million," Councilor Don Overcash said. "We've been talking and complaining and pressuring the state to get behind this and do this and I think minimally, this is what we should be doing."

Shaffer said while she wasn't opposed to making Loveland's contribution \$2 million instead of \$1 million, councilors need to consider that getting a third lane doesn't fix problems permanently — a fourth will eventually be needed, and transit issues are not addressed in the interim solution.

There's also the \$450 million project ahead in seven to eight years of the U.S. 34 interchange, she added.

Clark and Councilor Rich Ball said Loveland needed to take the lead on the efforts to fund improvements, which Ball said are at "our front door."

Gutierrez said while he understood those sentiments, he wants to make it clear that Loveland is essentially contributing a third of the local match, contributing money from the road and bridge mill levy as well as money from the Centerra Metro District if developer McWhinney allocates funding to the project, in addition to the \$2 million.

But Clark pointed out that the McWhinney contribution would actually save money in the long run because the Colorado Department of Transportation has offered to take over operations of Kendall Parkway in exchange for funding.

"The total pay over the years is far greater than \$6 (million) or \$7 (million) or \$8 million (from McWhinney)," Clark said.

Train Horn Noise

Councilors also approved spending \$1.5 million for train crossing improvements to the establish a quiet zone for train horn noise if



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A train crosses Monroe Avenue on Wednesday afternoon as it leaves the Great Western Railway yard just south of East 11th Street in Loveland. The Federal Railroad Commission is asking for public input until July 5 on train horn noise. The city of Loveland is also applying for a federal grant to create a quiet zone for its trains on BNSF tracks. (Michael Brian / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

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another federal
TIGER grant is successful.

In 2005, the Federal Railroad Administration made changes to train horn regulations, requiring the use of the horns more frequently and at a higher decibel level.

Local communities, including Loveland, have advocated for the administration to open up public comment on the issue, as they have been hearing increasing complaints from residents over the years.

After three years of agreeing to do so, the Federal Railroad Administration opened public comments on the rules for 120 days, ending July 5. Anyone who wants to comment can go online to federalregister.gov/a/2016-04831 (<http://federalregister.gov/a/2016-04831>) or by mail to Federal Railroad Administration, Office of Railroad Safety, Mail Stop 25, West Building, Third Floor, 1200 New Jersey Ave. SE, Washington, D.C. 20590.

While estimates in 2009 of upgrading all of Loveland's 33 crossings came in at more than \$9 million, the city's application would only be for its BNSF tracks, totaling about 20 railroad crossings. The \$1.5 million would be the local match for \$6 million from the federal government if the grant is approved.

While not all public commenters thought this was the best use of the city's \$1.5 million, residents and councilors expressed concerns about the noise and quality of life impacts.

Gutierrez encouraged residents to voice their concerns to the Federal Railroad Administration.

Shaffer said she was proud of the regional work communities have done to have the comment period reopened, especially that of the U.S. 287 Corridor Coalition.

More information about the comment period will be posted to the city's website, cityofloveland.org (<http://cityofloveland.org>).

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