

Railroad Committee Report

Uptown Triangle Neighborhood Association

**Meeting with the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad
4822 Tchoupitoulas Street, New Orleans, LA 70115
Telephone 896-7410, Fax 896-7419**

August 2008

In June 2008, the UTNA Railroad Committee met with representatives of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad (NOPBRR) to discuss neighborhood concerns. We discussed quality-of-life issues including locomotive horn blowing, parking and uncoupling trains along Leake Avenue, railroad and neighborhood safety, parking of automobiles along the railroad tracks, railroad governance, a complaint process, and other issues listed below. At the meeting were UTNA members Dennis Herlihy, Chairperson, Pam Caruso, Frank Barnes, and Sheldon Hersh.

We met with Tom Lobello, Chief Operating Officer, John Morrow, Chief Financial and Mechanical Engineer, and Jim Bridger, General Manager. The NOPBRR has been our neighbor for 100 years. We applaud their safety record and their willingness to be a good neighbor. We look forward to future discussions. This is a summary of our meeting:

Horn blowing along Leake Avenue

- Trains blow horns as they approach crossings at the Corps of Engineers, Carrollton Avenue, and Oak Street. Trains also blow horns near Bisso Marine and along the “Butterfly.”
- Train horns are tested for loudness in decibels about four times a year; train horns should not be louder than 96 decibels.
- There is no official “Quiet Zone” in our neighborhood; NOPBRR has an informal Quiet Zone from 10 pm to 5 am when trains ring their bell instead of blowing their horn.

Parking trains along Leake Avenue; Coupling and uncoupling of trains

- NOPBRR does not intentionally park trains along Leake Avenue. If there is a backup or problem up-track, trains may be left along Leake Avenue until the bottleneck is relieved.
- The two sets of tracks along Leake Avenue from Magazine Street to Oak Street are among the longest and straightest tracks to park trains temporarily until an up-track bottleneck is relieved.
- Trains temporarily parked along Leake Avenue should have a locomotive attached to them. Railroad cars may be uncoupled to avoid blocking roads.
- Locomotive engines should not be left idling for hours or overnight while parked temporarily along Leake Avenue.

- The starting or stopping of trains parked temporarily along Leake Avenue may cause loud neighborhood shaking. NOPBRR strives to reduce this noise.
- NOPBRR takes seismic readings to be sure the railroad does not cause damage to neighborhoods.

Railroad safety

- NOPBRR assured us they have an emergency plan in place to deal with accidents or hazardous spills.
- If an accident or hazardous spill occurs, local New Orleans police or fire personnel will notify us to evacuate.
- Railroad personnel are continually drug tested.
- The speed limit for trains along Leake Avenue is 10 miles an hour.

Parking automobiles between the railroad tracks and Leake Avenue

- The City of New Orleans owns the land under the railroad tracks; NOPBRR has a “perpetual servitude” allowing it to use the tracks. If NOPBRR removes a track, the servitude ends and the land reverts to the city.
- NOPBRR voluntarily placed railroad timbers alongside the tracks at the Riverbend to prevent automobiles from encroaching on trains’ right-of-way. NOPBRR is responsible only for land between the railroad timbers and the tracks.
- NOPBRR does not regulate automobile parking along the Riverbend.

Other railroad companies run trains on Leake Avenue tracks

- Besides NOPBRR, six major railroads from across the country use Leake Avenue tracks. New Orleans and Chicago are the only cities in the country where all six major railroads converge.
- Although all railroad companies have a copy of our local rules, problems can occur when out-of-town railroad crews are not familiar with these rules.
- The number of railroad cars traveling along Leake Avenue is about 7,000 each month.

Railroad Governance

- NOPBRR is a quasi-City-State Agency owned by the citizens of New Orleans. The Public Belt Railroad Commission manages the NOPBRR. The President of the Commission is the Mayor of New Orleans.

Emergency contact

- To report a railroad emergency, 24 hours a day, call 896-7442.

Complaints

- To make a complaint, call 896-7410.
- Report the date, time, and description of the incident. Reporting the railroad company name on the lead locomotive and the locomotive number will help; but reporting even the identification number from one railroad car can help identify the train and its crew.

- Send a copy of your complaint to Dennis Herlihy, UTNA Railroad Committee, at DHerlihy32@aol.com.

Railroad web sites

- NOPBRR web site <http://www.NOPB.com>
- Federal Railroad Administration <http://www.fra.dot.gov>
- Train horn rules <http://www.fra.dot.gov/us/content/1318>
- Environmental concerns <http://www.fra.dot.gov/us/content/25>