

EDITORIAL

Train talk

We don't yet know whether the Baker City Council will commit public dollars to establishing a Quiet Zone in town, meaning freight trains would no longer sound their whistles as they approach street crossings in town, except in emergencies. The Council's decision Tuesday to file a notice of intent to apply doesn't obligate the city to do anything more.

But however councilors proceed, they need to ensure their decision is based on evidence rather than speculation. And the available evidence shows that Quiet Zones do not compromise public safety. An October 2017 report from the Government Accountability Office — the official auditor of federal programs — concludes that analyses in 2011 and 2013 by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) "showed that there was generally no statistically significant difference in the number of accidents that occurred before and after quiet zones were established." The FRA studied 359 quiet zones in 2011, and 203 more in 2013.

This ought not be surprising. The FRA doesn't approve Quiet Zones unless the requesting city bolsters the existing warning system at at least some of the affected railroad crossings (a 2016 report to the Baker City Council stated that to qualify, the city would have to improve at least two of the five public, at-grade railroad crossings in the city). Generally this involves installing gates, medians or other devices that are more effective than existing devices at keeping cars off the tracks when a train is coming.

There's another reason why the lack of a correlation between Quiet Zones and an increase in accidents at railroad crossings is eminently logical. The train's whistle is hardly the only method to alert drivers and others that a train is approaching — and it's reasonable to believe that the whistle usually isn't even the most effective method. At each of the five public crossings in Baker City that could be affected by a Quiet Zone designation, there are flashing red lights and warning arms that drop when a train nears. If someone either fails to notice these measures, or chooses to ignore them, it seems unlikely that a loud whistle would stave off a tragedy. Indeed, those tragedies happen occasionally even when the train's whistle was blaring when the collision happened.

By contrast, physically preventing vehicles from reaching the tracks — the purpose of the devices that must be installed to qualify for a Quiet Zone — is much closer to foolproof. Whistles or not, if the train is on the track but you, or your vehicle, are not, then you're safe. And lest anyone believe otherwise, even in Quiet Zones train operators can sound the whistle if they deem it necessary, so whatever safety margin the whistles provide would not be eliminated.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Thoughts on Veterans Day and train whistles

First, I attended the Veterans Day Memorial at the Baker County Courthouse on Monday, Nov. 11, at eleven o'clock. Thank you to the veterans in attendance, and also a "thank you" to the respectful citizens present. Two things during the event troubled me. First, the American flag flying on the County Seat flagpole needs to be replaced respectfully due to it being tattered with weather wear and tear; in addition, the speaker system used both at the Mount Hope Cemetery Memorial Day ceremony, and during the Veterans Memorial Event at the Baker County Courthouse each holiday is not effective, as it should ring out loud and clearly!

Secondly, I would like to comment on the city issue regarding the train whistles as described in current editions of the Baker City Herald. First, do people remember not so long ago, that four young teenagers were injured at the Haines railroad crossing, due to the fact that they were impatient with the crossbars being down and hearing no train whistle decided to zigzag skirt around the crossbars being hit on the train tracks by the oncoming train, and with no escape available quick enough?

Additionally, in reading the articles also addressing train whistles and Qui-

et Zone designations in La Grande, as well; may I ask or point out where and how would Baker City be able to meet the same regulation that La Grande must now meet of possibly \$200,000 to make the railroad crossings be more safe than ever before, in order to meet the requirements for a Quiet Zone being granted? Taxpayers?

It only seems common sense that if my choice of home was located near the current established railroad tracks, that I would assume that my common sense would tell me that I would certainly be hearing the traveling trains' alert announcement for public safety concerns!

Sharing my thoughts, and thank you for providing the venue to do so!

Cheryl Gushman
Baker City

Parents shouldn't encourage child to question gender

I'm asking for spiritual help in writing this letter because of the nature of it. When I first heard on the news about what the parents of a 7-year-old were putting this child through I was just a little angry. How could anyone in their right mind do this to any child, let along their own. With the mother the child has to act and dress as a girl, with the father dress and act as a boy. Do the parents have any idea what they

are doing to this child's mind, especially when older? Or do they care?

Question: What's on the birth certificate? That is the child's sex, either male or female, there's no way by playing God anyone can change that. Please excuse me if I recall God saying He made them male or female, not anything in between

You as parents had better find out what your schools are teaching. Some are teaching that children can choose what sex they want to be, male or female. Are they trying to destroy a generation of children growing up in an already confused world? I have to hotly disagree with the transgender belief that you can change your sex with a knife or with a transplant. God does not make mistakes, and you are not God, that you can recreate what is already done. Whatever is changed on the outside, never changes what's on the inside. Whatever your birth certificate says, you are still on the inside. Where is the social service on the problem with this 7-year-old? It's truly child abuse in the highest form.

God can and will forgive you for the modulation of your body if you ask sincerely. Please read Romans 1:24-32, Isaiah 5:20-24, Isaiah 55:7 and Proverbs 28:13.

Richard Fox
Baker City

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer

letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be

published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

Email: news@bakercityherald.com

Football, food and free: You have my attention

An email that prominently features the words "food" and "tester" and "free" is as irresistible to me as the film "Point Break," the chorus of Duran Duran's "Rio," and Oreo cookie filling.

Among many other enticing, but not especially nutritious, things that squeeze my dopamine receptors.

(Or whatever it is that happens to dopamine receptors that causes them to splurt.)

Email pitches have much in common with TV ads — besides, that is, a certain cheesy appeal. Both forms of media also need to grab your attention with the ferocity of a polar bear seizing a seal that's preparing to plunge off a floe.

We consumers are a flighty lot, under constant bombardment by pitches vying for our time and, ultimately, our money. If our attention is diverted for even a moment there's always a competitor ready to yank us in a different direction — always another scene featuring Patrick Swayze and Keanu Reeves on surfboards, always another sandwich cookie with double the sweet stuff in between.

The crafters of these messages



often try to keep us from such distractions through the generous use of capital letters and exclamation points, these most generally employed as a grammatical tag team.

(And with as much subtlety as an actual tag team leaping together from the turnbuckles in defiance of the "rules" of wrestling.)

Perhaps I'm jaded but this approach — the written equivalent of screaming in my face — has the opposite of its intended effect.

The more exclamation points, the more likely I am to aim my cursor at the trash can icon.

But as I mentioned, I am vulnerable to certain words.

And the idea of being a food tester, I submit, is one that many people find difficult if not impossible to ignore.

The concept is attractive because it's so different from normal. The prospect of being paid to eat —

something most of us enjoy, and that all of us must do anyway — seems to me comparable to, say, earning a check for driving a Ferrari or doing something else that we expect to have to pay for, sometimes dearly.

This particular pitch, which arrived in my inbox from a website called Pickswise, also staved off a robotic deletion in part by referring to the National Football League.

This distracted me long enough to discern that the winner of this online contest would be paid to go to NFL games and while there gobble burgers, pizza and whatever else the stadiums' concession stands serve.

As anyone knows who has ever attended a football game, the menus lean heavily (literally) toward scrumptious dishes dominated by meat and cheese, and the taps dispense copious quantities of soda and beer.

Kale and tofu are conspicuous for their rarity.

(Even, one would hope, by their absence.)

The email notes that "no experience of qualifications are required" besides being at least 21. But this

seems to me to avoid the obvious question.

How many adults, whatever their affinity for nachos and hot dogs, can upset their schedule (and likely their stomachs, given the nature of stadium cuisine) to jet about the U.S. for several weekends this fall?

I'd happily attend football games and jot down my impressions of the bratwurst and soft pretzels, but I can't make it happen, what with a job and a family, commitments most of us share.

I'd not heard of Pickswise until I opened the email.

The outfit's focus isn't food but sports gambling. Pickswise offers free tips for betting on pro and college games.

I'm not much on wagering so I can't judge whether this advice is sound.

But if I were I'd probably be leery of risking much money on Pickswise's, well, picks.

For one thing its Twitter feed misspelled the first name of Oklahoma quarterback Jalen Hurts as "Jaylen." And there were multiple references, so I have to conclude that Pickswise actually believes

the "y" is supposed to be there, which no doubt would surprise Mr. Hurts.

The email announcing the food-tester contest also refers to NFL games as "matches," a term you will not hear on ESPN's football coverage.

That curiosity, along with the word "favorable" being spelled "favourable" in the British fashion on Pickswise's website, suggests the site's origin is at least outside America.

Not that I have any issue with our erstwhile colonial overlords mucking about in our favorite sport, even if their focus is on the concession stands rather than the field (or pitch, if you prefer).

Still and all, if I were inclined to take a run at being Pickswise's official NFL food tester, I'd ensure my entry form had at least one reference to "chips" rather than "fries."

A generous dollop of sycophancy, much like a couple extra pumps on those machines that dispense nacho cheese sauce, can only improve the situation.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.