

Safety steps silence whistle

By Beverly Perna
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Ipswich will meet the June 24 deadline to maintain the no train whistle zone through town.

Traffic safety work at the Topsfield Road, Washington Street, Mineral and Liberty Streets, and Linebrook Road rail crossings is nearly complete, according to Rick Clarke, director of Public Works.

The town was required to complete supplemental safety measures at each crossing in order to permanently silence the train whistles.

"We did enough so we will not have to go back annually"; Clarke said.

Clarke went before the Board of Selectmen Monday night to make Liberty Street one way from Washington Street to Central Street and Mineral Street one way from Central to Washington Street, effective June 1, part of the plan to increase crossing safety.

The board voted unanimously in favor of the one-way streets.

An island has been installed at the intersection of Brown and Mineral Streets to prevent left turns from Brown Street once Mineral becomes one-way south.

Work in the area of the train station is most noticeable. Curbing has been installed between the lanes approaching both sides of the crossing to prevent drivers from trying to get around the crossing gates. In addition, the entrance to the parking lot has been reconfigured to prevent cars from speeding in and out of the lot, always a hazard when trains arrived and departed.

The sidewalk has also been reconfigured farther away from the train platform, and a pedestrian overpass installed to route foot travelers to the new sidewalk.

The crossing gates at each street have been lengthened with extensions. Curbing has been installed at the edge of the road at Linebrook Park to prevent cars from whipping out of the parking lot there into the crossing area.

All of the improvements were designed by the local civil engineering firm, Graham Associates and met the approval of the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Rail Company, the only company authorized to work on the train lines. Clarke said the project cost approximately \$350,000, substantially less than the original \$1 million figure forecasted to meet the whistle-silencing standards.

In addition to current work on railroad crossings, the DPW removed the cobblestone crossing on Green Street after neighbors complained it was noisy. Some of the cobblestones have been used for a "flush" island at Green St. and Turkey Shore Road to direct the flow of traffic at that intersection.

Clarke said that the DPW is currently deciding on crosswalk treatments for the downtown area and hopes to get started on that project in August. With long-lasting lead-based paint no longer used to mark crossings, the current applications last about two months.

A contender for crosswalk treatments is one increasingly used throughout the Commonwealth called "Duratherm." Asphalt is heated and impressed with a design that is then filled in with a thermoplastic material that is skid/slip resistant.

The Duratherm crosswalk is intended to improve pedestrian safety by its bright colors allowing drivers to take notice of an upcoming crosswalk earlier. "It will last about 10 years," Clarke said.

In the event the town is disappointed for a second year in a row by not receiving transportation improvement funds, the backup plan to improve the main roads is to rely on the \$2 million dollar bond approved at the recent town meeting.