

WYLIE AND KANSAS CITY SOUTHERN: STRONG RAILROAD TIES

CITY EMBRACES HISTORY WITH RAILROAD WHILE PREPARING FOR INTERMODAL FACILITY



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City of Wylie
Photo by **Aerial Photography, Inc.**

The City of Wylie's rich history has railroad roots dating back to 1886 when the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railway laid tracks a half mile north of a small town named Nickelville. Recognizing the opportunity the railroad presented, Nickelville relocated and changed its name to Wylie in honor of Colonel W. D. Wylie, a right-of-way agent for the rail company. Since Wylie's incorporation in 1887, the railroad has played a role in shaping the city. The impact of the railroad continues to

this day with the construction of the 500-acre Kansas City Southern (KCS) Railway intermodal facility, destined to bring both progress and challenges to the community.

City officials have been aware of the intermodal project since the mid-1990s when land was purchased on the east side of town near an existing switching yard. Staff and city council began to explore ways to address the facility's impact and infrastructure needs, and maximize its benefits to the community.

In 2001, Wylie successfully worked with KCS to relocate the railroad

tracks running parallel to Highway 78. This major accomplishment opened hundreds of acres of light industrial and retail property along Wylie's main corridor, stimulating quality development. In addition, tracks were rerouted around Wylie's historic downtown district and 12 crossings were closed. Wylie Economic Development Director Sam Satterwhite said at the time, "the move will positively impact the Wylie community, and the effects will be seen for the next 50 years." His prediction has proven correct.

In 2008, Wylie City Council began the process to establish railroad quiet zones, taking steps to continue the

partnership with the railroad and improve quality of life for citizens. The zones were established in 2009, with road barriers installed in early 2010 in preparation of potential increased rail traffic.

Now, with the construction of the KCS intermodal facility underway in Wylie, the city and the railroad continue their relationship. The \$58 million project that will connect North Texas commerce from Mexico to Canada, also includes a 250 acre light industrial park facing Highway 78. With a minimum taxable value of \$313 million and more than 2 million square feet of developable space, the park is expected to add significantly to Wylie's tax base.

Wylie's intermodal facility's Phase 1, which broke ground in June of 2014 and is projected for completion in mid-2015, incorporates two 5,000-foot intermodal tracks and more than 1,500 parking spaces. The annual lift capacity for Phase I is 264,000 units (containers and trailers). Phase II plans include additional tracks, container parking and the industrial park. When complete, the facility will feature 80 acres of pavement for approximately 2,800 container parking stalls.

The project brings several challenges to Wylie, including increased traffic and lighting and noise at the intermodal site. Cooperation is critical since federal law preempts local zoning and permitting regulation for rail activities. County representatives and city staff met with KCS throughout the preplanning stages and construction phase to work through concerns, such as the location of the facility's entrance and the truck access on and off Highway 78.

KCS estimates that by 2016 the facility will generate 1,155 truck trips on top of the current daily truck count of 500. To minimize effects of increased truck counts, keep traffic moving,

and address safety concerns, KCS invested an additional three million dollars to acquire additional property to move the entrance and gatehouse to a new location, add acceleration/deceleration lanes, and install a traffic signal. In turn, the city council budgeted funds for a Police Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Unit trained to inspect multi-axle vehicles and to help reduce potential accidents.

Traffic concerns have also been addressed through a detailed thoroughfare plan developed by the city in conjunction with Collin County officials. In addition to the increased truck traffic, the North Central Texas Council of Governments projects a daily traffic count on Highway 78 of 88,000 by the year 2035, an increase of more than 300 percent. Planning

is critical to ensure continued mobility and adequate infrastructure as Wylie grows and continues to attract new businesses.

Regarding lighting and noise, KCS agreed to install lighting fixtures to control excess spill light, containing the light only on the property. The existing classification yard will shield the facility on the north, and the industrial park will do so on the south, keeping noise to a minimum.

Like many Texas towns, the railroad played a key role in Wylie's beginnings and continues to impact its growth and prosperity. Careful planning, strong relationships, and a cooperative spirit will ensure Wylie continues down the right track. ★



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