

Raise the Grade on Grade Crossing Safety

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN RAILROADS

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WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Continue to fund the “Section 130” federal grade crossing safety program. Encourage the use of a broad set of engineering, education, and enforcement actions to enhance safety at grade crossings.

WHY?

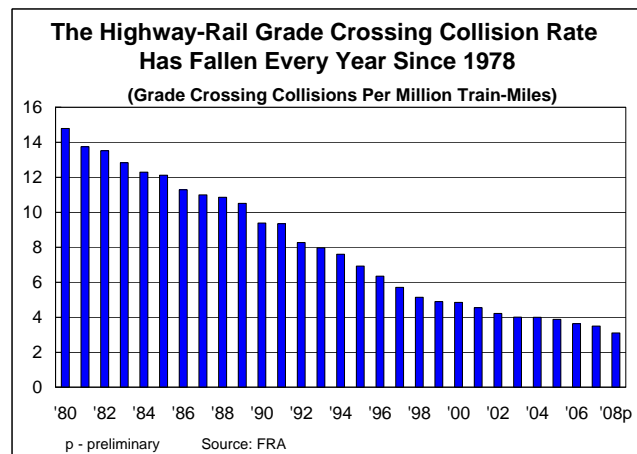
Grade crossing collisions have fallen sharply over the years, but too many still occur. Virtually all of these collisions are preventable, so the focus should be on **educating** the public regarding safety at crossings, on **engineering** solutions (such as closing unneeded crossings and upgrading warning devices) that prevent collisions, and on **enforcement** of applicable traffic laws.

What Are Highway-Rail Grade Crossings?

- A highway-rail grade crossing is where a railway and roadway intersect. There are approximately 227,000 grade crossings in the United States.
- Grade crossings are protected either by train-activated “active warning devices” (such as gates and flashing lights) or by “passive warning devices” (such as crossbucks, stop signs, and yield signs). Trains often require a mile or more to stop and they can’t deviate from their course. That’s why safety at grade crossings is, by its very nature, primarily a motorist responsibility. The warning devices **are there to protect motorists**, not trains.
- States, not railroads, are responsible for evaluating grade crossing risks and prioritizing grade crossings for improvement. The decision to install a specific type of warning device at a particular public grade crossing is made by the **state highway authority, not by a railroad**, and approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

Safer Than Ever

- From 1980 through 2008, the number of grade crossing collisions fell 78 percent; injuries associated with collisions fell 76 percent; and fatalities fell 66 percent. **The grade crossing collision rate, which fell 79 percent from 1980 through 2008, has fallen every year since 1978.**
- The vast majority of grade crossing collisions are the result of motorists’ actions; only a miniscule number



result from the failure of crossing gates or signals. According to a 2004 U.S. Department of Transportation report, “Risky driver behavior or poor judgment accounted for 31,035 or 94 percent of public grade crossing accidents” from 1994-2003. Most of the rest were vehicles stuck, stalled, or abandoned at crossings.

- America’s freight railroads typically spend **more than \$250 million each year** to maintain and improve grade crossings. They also:
 - ✓ **Cooperate** with state agencies to install and upgrade warning devices and signals, and **bear the cost** of maintaining them.
 - ✓ Help pay to **close unneeded crossings**.
 - ✓ **Support Operation Lifesaver**, a nationwide non-profit organization that educates the public about the need for proper behavior at grade crossings.
 - ✓ **Work with law enforcement** and others to keep grade crossings safe.
- Class I railroads are installing signs at public crossings that provide a unique ID number and a telephone number so that people can report emergencies.

Continue Federal Funding for Grade Crossing Safety

- Under the federal “Section 130” program, some \$220 million in federal funds are allocated each year to states for installing new active warning devices, upgrading existing devices, and replacing or improving grade crossing surfaces. The Section 130 program has helped prevent **tens of thousands of injuries and fatalities**, according to the FRA.
- Without a budgetary set-aside like the Section 130 program, grade crossing needs would fare poorly in competition with more traditional highway needs (such as highway construction and maintenance). One of the primary reasons the Section 130 program was created in the first place was that highway safety — and especially grade crossing safety — traditionally received low funding priority.
- More funding for the Section 130 program would make grade crossings safer — meaning **more injuries averted** and **more lives saved**.

Safety Must Be Priority Number One

Grade crossing accidents can best be reduced through **a mix of engineering, education, and enforcement**, including:

- Adopt a uniform national grade crossing closure process, combined with a freeze on the overall number of grade crossings within each state. Ultimately, eliminate grade crossings on the National Highway System.
- Generously fund Operation Lifesaver, as well as a research and development program to design effective low-cost active warning systems for grade crossings.
- Continue to examine the effectiveness of other types of warning device systems such as four quadrant gates.
- Require that grade crossing safety be part of commercial driver’s license educational curricula and mete out tough penalties for grade crossing traffic violations.
- Require a minimum set-back or a physical safety barrier between active railroad tracks and adjacent parallel trails and paths.