

NWI Rail Crossing Task Force (RCTF)

March 11, 2019 1:30 p.m.
Lake Michigan Room
6100 Southport Road, Portage

Agenda

1.0 Call to Order

2.0 Welcome & Introductions

3.0 Presentation – Railroad Crossing Issues in NWI

4.0 Discussion of Surface Transportation Board Remedies

5.0 Comments from Attendees

6.0 Next Steps / Federal Legislation

7.0 Next Meeting

8.0 Adjournment

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NW Indiana Rail Crossing Task Force Meeting
NIRPC Lake Michigan Room
December 17, 2018 – 1:30 pm – 2:45 pm
Notes

Tom McDermott called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Present were:

Tom McDermott, City of Hammond; Geof Benson, Beverly Shores; John Wotkun, Griffith; Dave Shilling, Gary; Theresa Mince, Purdue Extension; Veronica Jalomo, Purdue Extension; Sarah Kobetis, Gary; Tim Bietry, Michigan City; Justin Kiel, LaCrosse; Blossom Mabun, SLCCS; Brian Snedecor, Hobart; Phil Gralik, Hobart; Bill Oeding, Hammond; William Moore; EME Rail Solutions; Craig Zandstra, Lake County Parks; Mark O'Dell, Chesterton, Hector Rosario, East Chicago PD; Frank Smith, East Chicago PD; Bob Fulton, Hobart; Scott Vidimos, Vidimos, Inc.; Carolyn Saxton, Ogden Dunes; John Sherron, Kemira; Dean Button, Hammond; Roger Rhodes, Ogden Dunes; Mike Teeling, Ogden Dunes; Jan Bapst, Dune Acres; Bill Griffin, Dune Acres; Melissa Porter, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; Bryan Waisanen, Union Township; Adam McAlpine, Valparaiso; Steve Gropp; LaPorte, Laurie Keagle, South Shore Clean Cities; Bill Emerson, Lake County Surveyor; David Wright, GPTC; George Topoll, Union Twp. Trustee; Louis Arcari, Jr., East Chicago PD; Jeff Long, Hammond PD; Michelle Helton; Andrew Steele, NWI Times; Tim Zorn, Post-Tribune. NIRPC staff: Ty Warner, Trey Wadsworth, Mitch Barloga, Eman Ibrahim, Charles Bradsky, Peter Kimball, James Winters, Scott Weber and Mary Thorne.

Mitch Barloga presented some background information, including some rail and crash statistics, possible remedies like the CREATE program, Local Trax, Indiana grade crossing law, issues with air quality and blocked crossings and case studies.

Comments from attendees:

- There are significant issues, but the Surface Transportation Board (STB) is largely quiet
- Routes to schools are an issue, safety issues with kids literally climbing the connectors between train cars to get to school on time
- Parents driving their kids to day care can be fined if late and possibly reported to DCFS
- Reckless driving caused by road rage over blocked crossings on roads by people trying to get to work on time
- Hindrance of bicycle and pedestrian crossings by stopped trains / lack of cooperation from railroads in providing safe crossing when tracks are not blocked by a train
- Do not blame the engineers who are only doing what they have been told to do
- Ticketing was not a deterrent; there was a 'no fear' mentality
- officers could only issue one ticket even if the train blocked three crossings (which are now prohibited by the Supreme Court ruling)
- Railroads trying to make "deals" to avoid tickets
- Emergency vehicles (police, fire, ambulances) cannot cross roads with stopped trains which is a major safety issue and can be a matter of life and death to a patient
- Train issues occur at least weekly
- Trains can be stopped for over an hour
- Air quality is an issue, especially in urban areas, for kids, EJ and elderly, also noise pollution, quality of life issues

- Trains idle because it takes too long to restart the engine
- STB has 5 members, only 2 slots filled; nominees have been made, not yet appointed
- STB needs to be involved
- Try to get the feds to help
- Contact legislators to get them onboard
- Invite medical representatives, air quality representatives
- Opportunities coming up with the reauthorization of the FAST Act
- This is a nationwide problem; get other MPOs together
- Get NIRPC's attorney involved to review other cases to better understand how to approach STB
- Railroads are overseen by the STB
- Need to collect data; the more the better to demonstrate how this is hurting communities, not just with anecdotal stories
- Try to get data from railroads and the South Shore
- Come up with alternatives to submit to the railroads and STB (alternative staging areas)
- Railroads hate negative PR
- Transit routes are negatively impacted too
- Bike and ped trails are impacted by parked trains
- Estimated costs of crossing gates continue to increase
- NIRPC has a data-intensive report from 2013 on grade crossings

The next meeting of the task force will be on March 11 at 1:30 p.m. in the Lake Michigan Room at NIRPC.