

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

#-170

Forwarded to:

Honorable Karl S. Bowers
Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
Washington, D.C. 20590

Honorable John M. Sullivan
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
Washington, D.C. 20590

Mr. Alan S. Boyd
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Railroad Passenger Corporation
400 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

ISSUED: December 27, 1978

Forwarded to:

Mr. Prime F. Osborn
President
Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Company
500 Water Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Honorable Thomas B. Webb, Jr.
Secretary
Florida Department of Transportation
Haydon Burns Building
Tallahassee, Florida 32304

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-78-71

At 8:25 p.m. on October 2, 1977, westbound Amtrak passenger train No. 57 struck a northbound pickup truck at a railroad/highway grade crossing in Plant City, Florida. The crossing was equipped with red flashing signals, which were operating. The train was traveling at 70 mph in a 79-mph speed zone; the pickup truck was traveling at 50 mph in a 45-mph speed zone. The 10 occupants of the pickup truck died in the crash. None of the traincrew or its 30 passengers was injured. 1/

An autopsy of the driver of the pickup truck disclosed a 0.14 percent blood alcohol level. The Florida traffic code states that a blood alcohol level of 0.10 percent or more is prima facie evidence of driving while under the influence of alcohol.

On the northbound approach to the Turkey Creek Road crossing, the westbound train was not visible to the driver until she passed a stand of trees 400 feet south of the grade crossing. At that point the train was 559 feet from the crossing. There was no way the train could stop. The pickup truck could have stopped short of the crossing after the train became visible, but there was no time available for hesitation on the part of the driver.

1/ For more detailed information read: "Railroad/Highway Accident Report: Seaboard Coast Line/Amtrak Passenger Train/Pickup Truck Collision, Plant City, Florida, October 2, 1977" (NTSB-RHR-78-2).

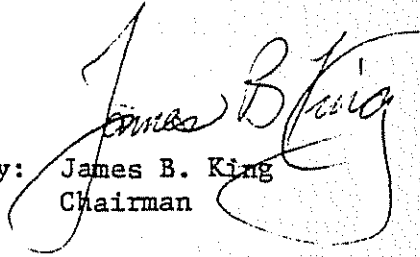
There were no railroad warning markings on the pavement on Turkey Creek Road, a nonfederal-aid roadway, for either approach to the crossing. The advance railroad warning sign for northbound traffic was installed 202 feet south of the crossing, rather than the 250 feet required in an urban environment.

Since 1971, the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT) reports four accidents at this crossing, which have resulted in two fatalities and two injuries. In 1977, a diagnostic team, including experts from the Florida DOT, Amtrak, and SCL personnel, had recommended that the Turkey Creek Road crossing be treated as a first priority for installation of gates and cantilever lights. The Jacksonville/Tampa high-speed train corridor traverses 240 miles of track and contains 271 crossings at grade, or 1.13 crossings per mile of track. By comparison, on the entire Amtrak system there are 0.61 grade crossings per mile of track. Also crossing accidents on the overall Amtrak system is 1.06 per 100 miles of track, while the average is 6.9 per 100 miles of track in the Jacksonville/Tampa corridor. Although Amtrak operates in 46 States, 17.8 percent of all of its grade crossing accidents during 1975, 1976, and 1977 occurred in Florida. The corridor is an area that needs study and corrective action.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Company, and the Florida Department of Transportation:

Cooperate to take necessary corrective action to reduce the high frequency of railroad/highway grade crossing accidents along the 240 miles of track between Jacksonville and Tampa, Florida. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-78-71)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, and HOGUE, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.


By: James B. King
Chairman