

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FOR RELEASE: 6:30 P.M., E.S.T., APRIL 20, 1976

(202) 426-8787

ISSUED: April 20, 1976

Forwarded to:

Honorable William T. Coleman, Jr.
Secretary
Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-76-13 and R-76-14

About 11:06 p.m. on June 5, 1975, a Reading Company commuter train struck a tractor-semitrailer (truck) at a grade crossing near Yardley, Pennsylvania. The truck was transporting three coils of steel, two of which penetrated the first commuter car. The three occupants of the lead car were killed and an occupant of the second car was injured slightly. The truckdriver was uninjured. The semi-trailer was torn from the tractor and damaged beyond repair and the lead commuter car was damaged extensively.

At the time of the collision, the automatic grade crossing signal system was functioning. The truckdriver said he had not seen or heard the warning signals.

Collisions between commuter trains and highway vehicles that can produce many fatalities can be expected wherever the transportation modes intersect at grade crossings. The Safety Board examined this type of collision in its investigation of a 1966 accident at Everett, Massachusetts, ^{1/} involving a collision of a commuter train with a fuel oil truck, and in a special study ^{2/} relating to rail rapid transit safety. In the accident report the Safety Board pointed out the incompatibility of commuter rail and highway traffic,

^{1/} National Transportation Safety Board, "Railroad-Highway Accident Report--Boston and Maine Corporation, Signal Diesel-Powered Passenger Car 563, Collision with Oxbow Transportation Company Tank Truck at Second Street Railroad/Highway Grade Crossing, Everett, Massachusetts, December 28, 1966." February 29, 1968.

^{2/} National Transportation Safety Board, "Special Study of Rapid Rail Transit Safety," June 16, 1971. NTSB-RSS-71-1.

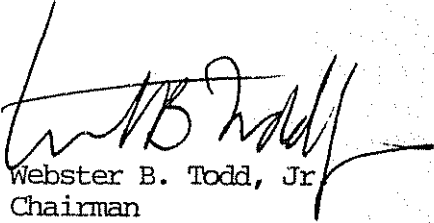
and in its special study, the Board recommended eliminating grade crossings on commuter systems. In the accident that occurred at Yardley, three persons in the lead car were killed. If the train had contained more occupants, the loss of life would have been much greater. The potential for catastrophic loss in this class of accident is apparent.

The Safety Board is aware of the Department of Transportation's work in grade crossing safety. However, there is no program directed specifically at the improvement of grade crossings used by rail commuter traffic. Rail commuters use only 3,070 miles of track--1.5 percent of the total rail track; however, they represent 93 percent of the rail passengers. The small percentage of the total railroad-highway grade crossings at which the largest number of rail passengers is at risk deserves high priority for improvement.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Department of Transportation:

1. Require flashing lights and gates as minimum protection at all grade crossings used by commuter trains. (R-76-13) (Class II, Priority Followup)
2. Develop a program directed at the improvement of all grade crossings used by commuter trains. This program should contemplate the separation of grades of all these crossings in the foreseeable future. (R-76-14) (Class III, Longer-Term Followup)

TODD, Chairman, McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.

By: 
Chairman

THESE RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC ON THE DATE SHOWN ABOVE. NO PUBLIC DISSEMINATION OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE MADE BEFORE THAT DATE.