

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: December 27, 1978

Forwarded to:

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

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-78-79

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 and fire that followed. None of the traincrew or its 30 passengers was injured. 1/

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.

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 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.

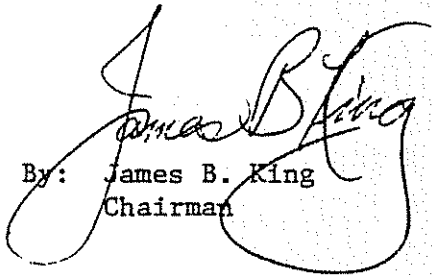
1/ For more detailed information read: "Railroad/Highway Accident Report: Seaboard Coast Line/Amtrak Passenger Train/Pickup Truck Collision, Plant City, Florida, October 2, 1977" (NTSB-RHR-78-2).

Also the crossing accidents ratio on the overall Amtrak system is 1.06 per 100 miles of track, while the ratio 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 Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Company:

Cooperate with the city of Plant City to expedite the installation of the recommended reflectorized, lighted automatic railroad/highway grade crossing gates and cantilever light signals at the Turkey Creek crossing in Plant City, Florida. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-78-79)

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


By: James B. King
Chairman