NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FOR RELEASE: 6:30 A.M., E.D.T., JUNE 18, 1976

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Forwarded to:

Honorable Norbert T. Tiemann
Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
400 Seventh Street, S. W.
Washington, D. C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-76-21 and 22

At 9:10 a.m., c.s.t., on November 19, 1975, Amtrak turboliner passenger train No. 301 was struck by a dump truck carrying a load of asphalt across a grade crossing in Elwood, Illinois. The crossing was unprotected and had limited sight clearance between the road and the track. Four cars of the five-car train were derailed and 41 persons were injured. The train was owned by Amtrak and was operated by an Illinois Central Gulf Railroad (ICG) crew over the ICG track. The road was a county highway maintained by the Will County Highway Department.

Manhattan Road had been paved and reconstructed to meet current highway design standards and was opened to traffic 20 days before the collision occurred. Although applicable traffic control signing and pavement markings were placed on the road, no active protection devices were installed. Bids on the road's reconstruction were opened in March 1975 and work began in May of the same year; however, the planning and negotiating process to provide for the purchase and installation of active protection was not initiated until September 1975--6 months after bids were opened for the reconstruction.

Had the process to install active protection at the crossing been initiated when the road construction was planned, the active protection might have been operational on the morning of the accident and may have alerted the truckdriver to the danger ahead in time for him to have taken appropriate action.

The Federal Highway Administration has contracted to develop a guidebook and a training course for highway/railroad engineers on the best current practices for the design, maintenance, construction, and operation of grade crossings. The guidebook and training course could emphasize the need for expediency and efficiency in the management of safety projects to improve grade crossings.

With the reestablishment of high-speed, high-density rail passenger service over tracks formerly used by freight train traffic alone, the population at risk at grade crossings has increased to the point that the consequences of train-motor vehicle collisions could be as serious as those of a major air disaster. If the dump truck had crashed head-on into the side of the passenger car or if it had been a vehicle carrying a hazardous material cargo, this collision could have been a catastrophe of major scale.

In 1972, the Department of Transportation reported to Congress concerning railroad-highway safety. The report cited short term and long term projects which employed various methods to protect grade crossings, and also suggested that each high-speed rail corridor be reviewed.

After this collision occurred, the Illinois Department of Transportation began to review the Chicago-to-St. Louis corridor. There is no evidence to indicate that any significant projects were initiated or implemented on the Chicago-to-St. Louis corridor or on most of these corridors before the collision.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Highway Administration:

1. Include procedures in the FHWA guidebook and training course for highway/railroad engineers, concerning the design and safety of grade crossings, which will insure that proposed active grade crossing protection devices are operational when upgraded or newly constructed streets or highways are opened. (H-76-21) (Class II, Priority Followup)

2. Urge and assist all States which have high-speed passenger train corridors to (1) initiate without delay a comprehensive field review of the corridors and (2) establish and implement a schedule of projects to insure that each grade crossing receives appropriate safety treatment. (H-76-22) (Class II, Priority Followup)

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

By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman

THESE RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC ON THE DATE SHOWN ABOVE. PLEASE DO NOT DISSEMINATE ANY INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN BEFORE THAT DATE.