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NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FOR RELEASE: 6:30 P.M., E.D.T., SEPTEMBER 30, 1976

(202) 426-8787

ISSUED: September 30, 1976

Forwarded to:

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

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-76-31 and H-76-32

At 6:50 p.m., c.s.t., on February 7, 1976, a westbound Baltimore and Ohio freight train struck a pickup truck at an unprotected grade crossing in Beckemeyer, Illinois, when the pickup truck proceeded across the crossing without stopping. Of the 16 persons in the truck, 12 were killed and 3 were injured.

In 1972, there were 158,000 grade crossings in the United States which did not have active signal systems.[1/] The grade crossings are located along public roads or streets that are not part of the Federal-aid highway system. The crossing in Beckemeyer was on such a public street. Jurisdiction over grade crossings on public roads which are not part of the Federal-aid system rests within the individual States and usually is shared by one or more local public agencies and the railroad.

Ideally, there should be either a grade separation or an active signal system at every railroad crossing. The fact that there are over 158,000 unprotected grade crossings in the United States makes this goal almost impossible to achieve. There are not enough resources available to install active controls on all of these crossings. This means that each unprotected grade crossing must compete with all other such crossings for those resources that have been allocated to install active signal equipment.

1/Report to Congress, Railroad-Highway Safety, Part II, "Recommendations for Solving the Problem," Department of Transportation, 1972.

At least a dozen models or formulae have been developed during the past 40 years to assess the degree of hazard associated with railroad crossings. The models and formulae are based on a combination of such factors as the volume and speed of traffic on the roadway, the volume and speed of trains, the volume of pedestrian traffic, the amount of reduced sight distance, and the accident record. The data obtained when a model or formula is applied to a crossing is used to determine the type of active equipment and the priority for its installation. None of the models are structured to produce a decision to close a crossing or to consolidate two or more crossings into one.

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

Develop models, formulae, and criteria which, in addition to assessing the hazard levels of grade crossings, will produce an output which indicates the need to consolidate and upgrade crossings or to close certain crossings. (H-76-31) (Class II, Priority Followup)

Publish these models, formulae, and criteria, make them available to each State and to the operating railroads, and urge their use in assessing grade crossings. (H-76-32) (Class II, Priority Followup)

TODD, Chairman, BAILEY, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS and HOGUE, Members, concurred in the above recommendations. HALEY, Member, did not participate.

By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman

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