

UPDATING THE U.S. D.O.T. CROSSING ACTION PLAN

FRA and Partners Undertake Development of a New US DOT Action Plan for Inclusion in the FY 2005 Budget.

As a part of its Conference Report for the FRA FY 2003 appropriations bill, the Senate directed the Secretary of Transportation to submit, at the time of the Department's FY 2005 budget request, an action plan outlining specific efforts to be pursued by the Federal Railroad Administration, along with the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the ITS Joint Program Office, to improve safety at public and private highway-rail grade crossings. The FY 2005 budget request is anticipated for submittal in February of 2004.

Background:

On June 13, 1994, the Secretary presented the Highway-Rail Crossing Safety Action Plan. (http://www.fra.dot.gov/safety/action_plan/contents.htm). This Action Plan identified 55 initiatives in six categories to be undertaken by the Department to enhance safety at grade crossings. The categories were:

1. Enhance Enforcement of Traffic Laws at Crossings
2. Enhance Rail Corridor Crossing Reviews and Improvements
3. Expand Public Education and Operation Lifesaver Activities
4. Increase Safety at Private Crossings
5. Improve Data and Research Efforts
6. Prevent Rail Trespass Tragedies

This Action Plan set a goal to reduce the number of collisions and fatalities at highway-rail crossings by at least fifty percent over ten years (as of 1994). Since 1994 there has been a 42% reduction in the number of fatalities at highway-rail grade crossings. There were 613 fatalities in 1994 and a preliminary figure of 355 in 2002.

Our envisioned approach to the formation of the new action plan centers on these ideas:

- The previous Plan will be updated with accomplishments, completed items, and a reorganized format for moving forward with new initiatives, outcomes, and goals. These goals should be established in view of resources and manpower available, while fulfilling Departmental policy aims.
- These objectives should be generic in nature, with illustrative examples for each objective.
- While these objectives may have specific target dates associated with them, the supporting illustrative examples will often be ongoing efforts such as facilitating crossing closures, or encouraging the more widespread use of engineering improvements at crossings to enhance safety and mobility.
- Important issues such as high profile, or "humped" crossings, private crossings, and trespass prevention, will likely need to be addressed in the new Action Plan.
- As lead agency for this effort within DOT, FRA will work closely with representatives from the other modes and our safety partners, to develop a unified Action Plan to continue and expand DOT's efforts to improve crossing safety in accordance with the wishes of Congress.

All submissions will be reviewed as part of the formulation of the Action Plan, and periodic summaries of comments received will be posted during the development process.