

STATE OF ILLINOIS



ILLINOIS COMMERCE COMMISSION

Carrie Zalewski

Chairman

July 19, 2021

Honorable Jay C. Hoffman
Assistant Majority Leader
State Representative – 113th District
312 S. High Street
Belleville, IL 62220

Honorable Bill Cunningham
President Pro Tempore
State Senator – 18th District
10400 South Western Avenue
Chicago, IL 60643

Dear Leader Hoffman and President Cunningham:

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns with increased freight train length and requesting that the Commission perform a study to assess the effects of these trains on public safety, communications, and interaction with Amtrak passenger trains. In May, we also received the attached letter from the Illinois Railroad Association inviting ICC and IDOT personnel to meet with the rail industry to discuss freight train operations and safety as part of IDOT's ongoing **Rail Needs Assessment** ([link](#)). In addition to these requests, Commission Staff (Staff) is required by federal statute (49 CFR 234.11) to complete a **State Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan** ([link](#)) in coordination with IDOT. Both studies are due early 2022. Staff will address your concerns during the development of the studies. Specifically,

1. Collection of Train Data & Review of Emergency Response Planning

Staff will meet with the rail industry and IDOT to determine the rail segments of interest/concern and availability of data from the railroads. We believe this would provide the most effective process.

Staff will conduct a survey of railroads, IDOT, local communities, and emergency responders to determine what emergency response plans are in place, what training or exercises have been conducted, and what the interval is for testing and modifying existing plans. The survey will request information on past incidents for any train involved in a crash, derailment, or other activity that blocked a crossing and created safety concerns with delay or limited access. Staff will also review current IEMA protocols to determine deficiencies, non-compliance, or areas of improvement.

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2. Train Crew Communications

Staff will conduct a survey of engineers and conductors to gauge the extent of lost or poor communications with hand-held radios at longer distances. Staff believes this survey would be best completed through SMART and BLET membership in addition to surveying railroad management. Staff will also coordinate with the FRA, as well as other states that are part of the State Safety Participation / Inspection Program as provided in 49 CFR 212 on this issue.

3. Amtrak On-Time Performance

Staff will coordinate with IDOT and Amtrak regarding performance measures, including On-Time Performance (OTP) of the three routes that host Amtrak. This would include the present status of OTP, as well as past conditions and any modifications that were implemented that impacted OTP. Staff will also review the sufficiency of siding storage to allow for freight and passenger train meets and passing.

The Illinois Commerce Commission is committed to ensuring the safety of Illinois' highway-rail crossings and overall rail safety. Thank you for reaching out to us with your concerns. Staff will be sure to keep you updated as the **Rail Needs Assessment, State Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan**, and additional work highlighted above are completed.

Sincerely,



Carrie Zalewski
Chairman

cc Omer Osman – Secretary of Transportation, IDOT
Mike Merchant – ICC, Executive Director
Michelle Kelm – Illinois Railroad Association, Executive Director
Bob Guy – SMART, State Legislative Director