

Transportation FRI / Texas House Transportation Committee / Interim Charge 2 – Interested Party Submission

Submitted by:

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Interim Charge 2: Transportation Safety

Transportation Commission campaign to end traffic deaths by 2050 / Opportunities to reduce accidents and fatalities / Funding strategies

Summary:

- Texas has the most railroad miles of any state in the U.S. – over 10,000 rail miles
- While fatalities and injuries at highway-rail crossings have been trending down, Texas ranked #1 in injuries and #2 in deaths in the latest national report
- Extremely limited state participation restricts access to Federal cost sharing programs that other states are able to leverage

Background:

The TxDOT Rail Division was established in December 2009 in response to a growing interest in rail transportation for both the movement of people and goods.

Fact:

Preliminary 2019 data from the Federal Railroad Administration show that Texas ranked #1 in collisions and injuries and #2 in deaths of all states. There were 251 collisions at highway-rail grade crossings. It resulted in 31 deaths and 123 injuries. There were also 100 pedestrian rail trespass casualties in 2019, resulting in 56 injuries and 44 deaths. Texas has the most public rail crossings of any other state with over 9,800 as well as over 6,700 private highway-railroad grade crossings. Many of the crossings are only equipped with passive signal devices.

State / Federal Funding:

The Federal Railroad Signal Program (FSP) is funded under the Surface Transportation Program (STP), Title 23, United States Code (USC) Section 130. It is managed by the TxDOT Traffic Operations

Division-Rail Safety Section (TRF-RSS) under Category 8 (Safety) of the Unified Transportation Program (UTP) as a bank balance allocation program. Each year, the Texas Transportation Commission authorizes the total amount of funding and the method of project selection. This provides flexibility within each program year to cancel and add projects to the program without Commission action.

The FSP Section 130 is funded with 90% federal and 10% state funds. Funding is set aside from the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) out of Category 8, excluding any cost participation from local governments and railroad companies.

The issue:

This is an underfunded program. The aprox. small amount of \$15 million that Texas receives each year from the federal government might only be enough to cover 1 (one) grade-separation project in the state or some smaller at-grade projects.

Suggested course of action:

- Texas Rail Advocates urges the legislature to have the TxDOT Rail Division prepare each year a list of highway grade crossing projects that require safety upgrades
- In advance of each biennial legislative session, have TxDOT present to the Texas Transportation Commission the list of Top 10 rail crossing safety projects
- The Transportation Commission, in its recommendation to the state legislature, requests funding for those 10 projects, with a dollar for dollar state match for available federal funding

