

Public Comments on Inquiry into Blocked Highway-Rail Grade Crossings throughout the United States, OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

Note: These comments were send directly to Mr. Robert Brogan, Information Collection Clearance Officer, Office of Railroad Safety, Federal Railroad Administration, Department of Transportation

#1

From: Andy Conyers [<mailto:Andy.Conyers@edmondok.com>]

Sent: Monday, August 12, 2019 12:20 PM

To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>; Toone, Kim (FRA) <[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>

Subject: Comments on OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

Mr. Brogan & Ms. Toone:

Greetings from Edmond, Oklahoma. Our community greatly appreciates you seeking input regarding blocked crossings as it has been a big issue for us. I realize that you all will be probably flooded with comments so I will attempt to be succinct and short.

We have 11 RR crossings in our community and our issues with the BNSF blocking them primarily are related to our 6 crossings in our downtown core. This area is the only one that is double tracked in our city limits so trains sit and wait for other trains to pass. A number of years ago we began to observe that the trains “sittings” were more frequent and for longer periods of time. Rather than just rely on the anecdotes we wanted facts. The way we got facts was through a security camera on one of our city buildings in downtown. The camera faces one of the crossings so it is fairly easy to observe blockages. What we have found (attached) helps paint a clearer picture of what is happening. This data is from 2015, 2017, and 2018.

We have had a fairly consistent line of communication with the BNSF from 2015, and of course, supplied them with this data, but as of yet have seen nothing to indicate that this data is doing anything to change their behavior in the immediate. On a positive note, they are willing to work with us on long term solution(s) which include adding tracks and possible grade separations. In fact, on our City Council agenda for this evening is a contract for a preliminary design study to look at the barriers and costs of adding tracks outside of our downtown core (splitting \$20K cost 50/50). While we are pleased that the BNSF is willing to work with us on long-term solutions we believe that these solutions will end up costing quite a bit of money.

Just realized I’m not keeping up my pledge of brevity! In closing, while are pleased the BNSF wants to partner with us on long-term solutions, we believe that until federal laws or regulations are adopted that specifically address the length of time a train may occupy a crossing this issue will continue to be a big problem for our community.

I’d be happy to discuss in further detail,

Andy Conyers

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#2

From: Tate, Treysea [<mailto:Treysea.Tate@seattle.gov>]  
Sent: Monday, August 12, 2019 6:20 PM  
To: Toone, Kim (FRA) <[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>  
Cc: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>; Beaulieu, Matt  
<[Matt.Beaulieu@seattle.gov](mailto:Matt.Beaulieu@seattle.gov)>  
Subject: FRA-2019-0004-N-10 - Data collection and reporting, Trains Blocking crossings -

Hello Kim (and Robert),

Yes, yes, yes, please proceed with the collection of data that will hopefully allow the FRA to establish safety and operational CFR's regarding the length of time a train may occupy an at-grade crossing based on data obtained from the collection methods presented in the ICR. I believe the FRA should certainly work to create a cohesive plan to obtain and analyze at-grade crossing train blockage data in order to identify ways and means to assist local jurisdictions in their attempts to ease urban congestion and prevent safety hazards to the general public.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Treysea M. Tate

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#3

From: [REDACTED]  
Sent: Thursday, August 08, 2019 3:46 PM  
To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>; Toone, Kim (FRA)  
<[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>  
Subject: Comments on OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

Greetings –

Let me first start by saying the public greatly appreciates the review of railroad crossing blockage, as it is of great concern to the citizens of Waseca.

For 14 years, I commuted to Mankato for work. Rail traffic wasn't too much of an issue for me as there were options to cross west of the city, I also lived on the "right" side of the tracks (being the north side) so crossing the tracks was not much of a hassle for me. However, that has changed with a transfer in residence as well as a transfer in my work location to Waseca. I currently live directly next to the tracks on the south side, next to a road crossing. Over the course of one year, I've witnessed the frequency and length of time that crossing is blocked (20-30 minutes several times), I'm also caught in the blocked crossings on a regular basis. As your online data states, there are several issues with these blockages all of which I have witnessed first-hand. Pedestrian traffic crawling under the still train, impaired emergency vehicle access and risky driver behavior in an effort to "beat" the train (speeding thru & around arms, speeding/reckless driving to get to the next intersection), as well as frustrated driver temperament

or “road rage” due to frustration from not being able to get from point A to point B. These delays are causing employees to be late for work and suffering the consequences from their employers, students late for school, parents arriving late to pick up small children and for some people, these delays can potentially result in added fees or wage deduction due to being late. It’s literally costing us money.

The city of Waseca was built around the intersection of two rail lines, they were here first and I understand that, while I have a great respect for the railroad and how it contributes to the infrastructure of our country, it also is an impediment to the daily lives of our citizens. “What can be done?” we constantly ask. We make laws that a crossing can’t be blocked for more than 15 minutes, thinking the railroad will respect these laws, but these fines are a drop in the bucket to the railroad and laughable to their executives given the financial status are not adhered to. As Waseca grows at a community, it is not practical to think an entire city can come to a screeching halt while a train consisting of 80+ cars switches additional cars in and out, this seems like a function best performed outside of the city limits, or anywhere but in the heart of a city during rush hour (yes, Waseca has “rush hours” and traffic headaches albeit minor in comparison to other communities J).

I trust that my name or personal information will NOT be linked publicly to my comments anywhere.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns.

Respectfully,



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#4

From: Robert Zimmermann [<mailto:RZimmermann@randallmetals.com>]  
Sent: Tuesday, August 06, 2019 10:35 AM  
To: Scott Vidimos <[scottv@vidimos.com](mailto:scottv@vidimos.com)>; Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>; Toone, Kim (FRA) <[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>  
Cc: [mark.lopez@mail.house.gov](mailto:mark.lopez@mail.house.gov); [avidimos@vidimos.com](mailto:avidimos@vidimos.com); [jill.smith@kemira.com](mailto:jill.smith@kemira.com); Jose Mendoza <[JMendoza@randallmetals.com](mailto:JMendoza@randallmetals.com)>; 'William Moore' <[wemoore@emerail.net](mailto:wemoore@emerail.net)>  
Subject: RE: FRA-2019-0004-N-10 and OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

I agree with Scott. We’ve had multiple instances of our employees being unable to get to work on time, as well as being able to leave work at shifts end due to lengthy blockages of both tracks.

We also continue to receive complaints from both our contracted truck lines as well as our customers for late deliveries for the very same reasons. This continues to affect our business along with,

and more importantly, the Safety risks to our employees should anyone suffer a life threatening injury. These blockages often times occur on almost a daily basis. Since all three of the businesses

involved have a much greater risk to these type of injuries, that in itself should be enough of a concern to get everyone who is responsible, want to make every effort to come up with a feasible resolution to this ongoing issue.

From: Scott Vidimos [<mailto:scottv@vidimos.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, August 6, 2019 8:53 AM

To: [Robert.Brogan@dot.gov](mailto:Robert.Brogan@dot.gov); [Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)

Cc: [mark.lopez@mail.house.gov](mailto:mark.lopez@mail.house.gov); [avidimos@vidimos.com](mailto:avidimos@vidimos.com); [jill.smith@kemira.com](mailto:jill.smith@kemira.com); Robert Zimmermann; 'Jose Mendoza'; 'William Moore'

Subject: FRA-2019-0004-N-10 and OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

More accurate reporting of train blockages is needed to confirm the magnitude of the problem. For instance, the note on page 27832 on Friday June 14, 2019 states that there were 669 email complaints to FRA's Office of Railroad Safety over a two year period. That number is ridiculously low compared to the number of times trains block crossings for extended periods. For example, our company's plant is located between two sets of tracks. One of them is served by a switching yard. Out of frustration due to the amount of time the tracks were blocked, we installed two cameras this past March and recorded the activity on the two sets of tracks over a 7 week period.

1. On the tracks to our west, there were 730 times the gates went down. The gates were down a minute or less 396 times, 10 minutes or more 51 times and a half hour or more 13 times. The longest blockage was 1 hour and 58 minutes.
2. On the tracks to our east, which are used by the IHB switching yard, the gates went down 1,717 times or 35 times per day. Of the 1,717 occurrences, the crossing was blocked 466 times for 15 minutes or more. The longest blockage was for 8 hours and 5 minutes.
3. We have not determined a number of times when both sets of tracks are blocked but it is likely to occur a number of times during the week.

Note that due to some construction in the area, passage over one of the two sets of tracks is required for traffic including emergency vehicles in order to access our business as well as the neighboring businesses. An accident could prove to be devastating if it occurred when one of both of the tracks were blocked.

Regarding the questions being asked pertaining to documenting blockage at railroad crossings:

1. It is necessary for the FRA to better monitor blockages at crossings to more properly execute its functions.
2. The FRA needs to more accurately assess the burden of information collection and determine the most economical and effective way to collect information. As stated above, at our company's expense, two cameras were installed and people were assigned to review 49 days of video recordings to document the activity in spreadsheet form. We

absorbed this expense to clear document the train activity because it impacts our costs due to the ongoing inconvenience of working around excessive train crossing blockages.

3. The three proposed enhancements in reporting sound useful but I'm skeptical about their effectiveness largely due to lack of public knowledge. The hurdle is to advertise their availability and make them user friendly. Perhaps the crossing identification signs can be supplemented with information regarding the ability to report blockages. I'd really like to see a billboard placed next to crossings to inform those stopped by excessive blockages that there is a vehicle to report the blockage. (I realize the billboard idea is not practical.) The city in which in business operates utilizes cameras to watch high traffic areas and other areas of concern. Cities and towns are already burdened with providing services to their constituents but they would be a logical data collection center. Also, I downloaded the FRA Crossing Locator App and played with it for a couple minutes. It is not very intuitive. Perhaps entering a crossing number would get me to a point to report a blockage but using the GPS locator didn't give me any apparent access to report a blockage.
4. A more automated method of monitoring crossing other than relying on motorists reporting would be the best option in order to capture complete and accurate information. If nothing else, there are state and cities that require hands-free driving. Getting a ticket for using a phone to report a train blockage would be adding insult to injury.

Scott Vidimos

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#5

From: Todd Blank [<mailto:tblank@sehinc.com>]

Sent: Monday, August 05, 2019 2:00 PM

To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>

Cc: Toone, Kim (FRA) <[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>; [lwoulfe@ci.cambridge.mn.us](mailto:lwoulfe@ci.cambridge.mn.us)

Subject: Comments on OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

Mr. Brogan,

Please accept these attached comments regarding a significant Highway blockage by rail cars in the City of Cambridge, Minnesota. This is jeopardizing the health, safety and welfare of the 9,000 City residents and the 14,000 vehicles per day that need the highway to flow properly. This has been occurring for many years despite ongoing efforts with the BNSF railway to mitigate or eliminate the problem.

Please contact me if you have any questions, or would like additional information. Thank you!

Todd M. Blank, PE (MN) | Principal

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#6

From: Barbara Holmes [<mailto:verncity@scicable.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, July 23, 2019 1:02 PM

To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>  
Subject: Blocked Crossings Comments

Hello,

I would like to make comments on the railroads crossings being blocked and the implications it causes. Our city has a population of 602 and we have a volunteer fire department/first responders. Our Fire Hall is located on the south side of two railroad crossings and the closest ambulance is six miles away. Having these crossings blocked prevents our fire department/first responders from responding to calls on the opposite side of the tracks and it also hinders an ambulance from being able to get to the south side of town. We have trains blocking both crossings at least twice per year for more than 10 minutes. When the crossings are blocked it also causes traffic to back up because one of the crossings is on a County Road that is used frequently by semis. We urge you to make a law that is enforceable; we have lives at stake.

*OMB Control Number: 2130-NEW.*

Thank you for your time.

Melissa Current

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#7

From: Tim Carrizal [<mailto:tcarrizal@yahoo.com>]  
Sent: Monday, July 15, 2019 9:29 PM  
To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>; Toone, Kim (FRA) <[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>  
Subject: OMB Control Number: 2130-NEW, Comments and Information

Hello,

Attached is a partial list of trains blocking Canal street (Houston, Texas) at the 6500 block that I compiled while I was out of work for a short period. This occurs daily, if not a few times a day, which I feel is excessive and also presents a safety issue when emergency vehicles cannot get through. I have also attached a picture, and I have some additional pics from most of the instances listed.

If you have any questions please let me know.

Regards,  
Tim Carrizal

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#8

From: Brian and Tracy Thompson [<mailto:btsthompson@gmail.com>]  
Sent: Thursday, June 27, 2019 3:28 AM  
To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>; Toone, Kim (FRA)

<[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>

Subject: Comments on OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

ICR Title: Inquiry into Blocked Highway-Rail Grade Crossings throughout the United States.

Since there are no federal laws or regulations that specifically address how long a train may occupy a crossing I had not previously thought to contact FRA regarding associated concerns.

I appreciate that FRA is now acknowledging this issue.

The at-grade crossing at Hwy 104 in Edmonds, Washington should be on the FRA watch list.

Traffic speeds are generally slow or stopped on the highway at this crossing, as the highway ends at a ferry terminal and city cross-street.

Access for emergency vehicles to residences and businesses west of this crossing is only via one of 2 at-grade crossings, located a block apart with a rail station between..

Since 2010, stopped trains have blocked both crossings, cutting-off vehicular access, on multiple occasions:

- May 1, 2010: 2.5 hours
- July 25, 2012: 1+ hours
- September 11, 2013: 45 minutes
- November 15, 2013: 4.5 hours
- April 19, 2016: 3 hours

There was also a collision with a semi-truck at this crossing October 15, 2012 when the crossing arm came down between the cab and the trailer.

In addition to these incidents, the crossings are blocked an average of 90-minutes per day by passing trains; up to 4 hours per day is projected in 2030.

Besides delaying emergency responses, this crossing at Hwy 104 delays commerce, including impacting the loading and unloading of Washington State Ferries.

Thank you for receiving this data to document safety concerns with the at-grade crossing in Edmonds, Washington at Hwy 104.

Sincerely,

Brian Thompson

Edmonds, WA

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#9

From: Scott Nutter [<mailto:snutter@auburnwa.gov>]

Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2019 6:05 PM

To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>  
Subject: OMB 2130 New

I am very glad that you understand on all the safety aspects of parked trains blocking public rights of way for pedestrians and cars and trains parked close enough to hold gates down unnecessarily.

We have watched and recorded events and close calls over the years with pedestrians and cars but with our local State Law being termed unenforceable we no longer report blockages over 15 minutes. I am sure there was a list of complaints kept by the Washington Utilities and Transportation commission.

With the blockages and close calls being ignored and gates being down for over 30 minutes becoming common place you are not going to get our police or employees to report any blockages online.

If you want good accurate information Local agencies and State agencies should be your audience to talk to

Scott Nutter

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#10

From: Amanda Parke [<mailto:amandaparke@icloud.com>]  
Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2019 6:00 PM  
To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>  
Subject: Comment on Indiana railroad crossings

Sir,

I live in Gibson County in Indiana and blocked RR crossing affect me and my husband every day. We live on the outer east side of Princeton and both drive southwest to get to work. My husband rides a bicycle to work (he has a license too 😊). If one of the crossings near us (County roads 350,400,450 and 500) are blocked he has to backtrack and ride all the way through Princeton to get there. It's so bad he has started a Facebook page called "Princeton Trains Suck" to draw attention to the issue.

Most often the crossings on Heights Chapel Road and all of the crossings near Francisco can be blocked on any given morning or evening. There is also a Crossing on County Rd 150E that is blocked continuously. I have not been able to cross there for at least 8-10 years. There are houses on both sides of the track on 150 E that are cut off from emergency personnel. This is a huge safety issue.

We really appreciate your attention on this matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,  
Amanda Parke



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#11

From: Jerry Gaskin [<mailto:jagdlg1197@gmail.com>]

Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2019 8:51 AM

To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>; Toone, Kim (FRA)

<[Kim.Toone@dot.gov](mailto:Kim.Toone@dot.gov)>

Subject: Blocked Highway-Rail Grade Crossings

RE: OMB Control Number 2130-NEW

Dear Office of Railroad Safety,

The Terre Haute, IN Tribune Star newspaper ran an article yesterday that you are interested in the public's view on trains and railroad crossings. The saying around here is "if you haven't been *trained* - you haven't been to Terre Haute." Before moving to Terre Haute 30+ years ago I used the word trained very differently.

It is rare not to see or hear a train over a major street in this town at any time of day. It is said that the railroad crossings of North 13th street and 8th Avenue have 50 trains per day. The western approach to the 8th Avenue track is riddled with potholes and uneven bits of pavement. This is becoming worse and is difficult to navigate. I have noticed other Rail Road track approaches are in poor condition but not quite as bad.

My friends have spoken of being "trained" 2 times on the same cross town journey by different trains. Folklore has it that the gangsters of the last century avoided Terre Haute because of the train traffic and the difficulty to get through town.

Waiting on trains is not convenient and can cause you to be late to any kind of activity. Leaving early may or may not help in trying to avoid a train delay. Terre Haute is at the mercy of the rail traffic.

The Margaret Avenue train overpass has been a wonderful solution to east -west traffic. I use it as often as possible. There are other parts of town that just cannot be gotten to without crossing a railroad track making travel hectic and at times unsafe. Fatalities have claimed the lives of drivers who try to beat the train & are too impatient to wait.

I personally wait on trains 4 -8 times per week on the way to work, to lunch, or to errands. In the past 30 years I have been late to children's activities, recitals, games, family gatherings, funerals, doctor's appointments, and the like due to a wait on a train at a railroad crossing in my path.

Trains are unavoidable when traveling in Terre Haute, Indiana. Thank you for your attention to this issue and the opportunity to vent.

Diane Gaskin

Terre Haute, Indiana.

#12

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From: John Doherty [<mailto:ptatcsport@sbcglobal.net>]

Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2019 8:44 AM

To: Brogan, Robert (FRA) <[robert.brogan@dot.gov](mailto:robert.brogan@dot.gov)>

Subject: Blocked railroad crossings

Mr. Brogan:

The general public should have a mechanism for reporting to the FRA slow-moving or stopped trains at railroad crossings.

Please let me know if there is any other information you require from me regarding this issue.

Sent from my iPhone

John J. Doherty, MS, PT, ATC