



## More, faster trains; X-ing reviews critical

Railroad traffic has increased dramatically in the last ten years due to a fast-growing economy and freedom from WWII-era government restrictions.

The Fox River corridor, for example, sees 20-25 trains a day, up from five to seven a decade ago. And the trains are moving 50 mph and more.

The combination of drivers not used to seeing many trains and brush-filled vision corners at rural crossings is a recipe for disaster. Even the full 330 feet of visibility only gives a driver about a six-second safety margin when the train is going 50.

"Not only do the trees and brush restrict sight, they also absorb the sound, and you need to clear them to pick up those fractions of seconds of visibility," says Rodney Kreunen, Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads. Local governments are responsible for clearing brush and trimming trees on highway right of ways; property owners are responsible for clearing the area in a sight triangle with 330 foot sides along the tracks and the road.

Local highway authorities should survey all grade crossings for visibility every June when the leaves are fully out. They are responsible for clearing brush on their land

and for alerting owners to problems on private land. A complaint to the Commissioner's office can help if owners are not complying or the railroad company has not cleared brush on its right of way.

Other solutions to potentially dangerous crossings involve closing the road that crosses the tracks, putting in stop signs, and installing signals. Kreunen has personally reviewed over 300 crossings since he took office a year ago, meeting with local officials and citizens to determine the best course of action. "Every crossing has its own peculiarities," Kreunen says.

Local officials can petition the office for review and possible closing of rural crossings. "We've had a steady stream of requests," Kreunen says. Depending on the situation, the railroad may pay the cost to cul de sac a road, or often a simple barricade is all that's needed.

*You can reach the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads at 608/266-7607, P.O. Box 8968, Madison, WI 53708.*



## Resources

*Materials listed are available from the Wisconsin T.I.C. unless otherwise noted. To get your copy call 800/442-4615, use the form below, or e-mail: ranum@engr.wisc.edu. Videotapes & CD-Is are loaned free through Wisconsin County Extension Offices.*

**NACE Action Guides Series**, National Association of County Engineers, 1992. Practical, straight-forward explanations, methods, examples, and further references to help you effectively organize and manage street and highway maintenance activities and organizations. A limited number are available on these topics:

Public Awareness and Support Personnel	Bridge Maintenance on Local Roads
Purchasing Authority	Bridge Rehabilitation on Local Roads
Impact of Land Development on Road Planning	Safety Improvements
Rural Transportation Planning	Traffic Operations
Road Programming	Drainage
Road Surface Management	Soil Erosion Prevention
	Subsurface Soils Exploration
	Solid Waste Management

**People Skills**, by Robert Bolton, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986, 300 pp. A simple to read and apply handbook that can help you be a better communicator. Learn skills that will increase your ability to listen to others, assert yourself, resolve conflicts, work out problems, and communicate calmly, even in stressful, emotionally charged situations. A great book for new supervisors.

**Gravel Roads, No. 5**, T.I.C., 4 pp. Discusses characteristics and types of gravel, blading, drainage, and maintenance.

**The SAFER Manual—Safety Evaluation for Roadways**, T.I.C., 40 pp. This is the Transportation Information Center's newest publication. It presents a hazard rating scale that is demonstrated with many pictures and brief text. The manual will help you identify potential hazards along your roadsides, at intersections and railroad crossings, and associated with roadway geometrics. It also covers the role of proper signs and pavement markings in reducing hazards. The *SAFER Manual* will help you identify hazards, rate safety needs, address immediate problems, and budget for longer term safety improvements.

**Signing for Local Roads, No. 8**, T.I.C., 6 pp. This fact sheet briefly reviews local officials' signing responsibility and describes common regulatory signs.

**Pavement Markings, No. 9**, T.I.C., 4 pp. A summary of pavement marking materials, principals, and applications.

**Highway/Utility Guide, FHWA-SA-93-049**, 1993, 298 pp. This guide assembles under one cover, state-of-the-knowledge on the better practices for addressing issues that arise when highways and utilities share a common right-of-way. Discusses permits, mapping and notification, legal issues, relocation reimbursement, and other topics. Only a few copies are available.

**Transient Protection, Grounding, and Shielding of Electronic Traffic Control Equipment**, NCHR Program Report #317, June 1989, 84 pp. Recommends installation methods to protect traffic control equipment against lightning and other transient and electromagnetic interference. Shows grounding, shielding, and filtering techniques for cabinets and components. A companion training videotape for technicians, *The Nuts and Bolts of Jolts*, has been added to the T.I.C. videotape library. Tapes are available through your UW-Extension County Office.