



Locals, R.R.s cooperate for safer crossings

More than 2700 passive railroad crossings will soon have a new look. By the end of summer 1999, each one will get brand new reflectorized cross-bucks signs. The new signs, which have "Railroad Crossing" on both sides, will significantly improve crossing visibility to drivers.

New reflective tape will also be applied on both sides of posts from the ground to the sign bottom. Studies

show it produces a flashing, strobe effect reflecting headlights between railroad cars when a train is moving across the crossing. Materials for the project, including replace-

ment posts where necessary, are paid for by a \$850,000 Federal Highway Safety grant through the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Railroads will pay for installation.

The new signs are part of a comprehensive effort to improve railroad crossing safety. This spring local officials, WisDOT staff, and railroad personnel gathered to discuss these safety issues at five seminars organized by the WisDOT Bureau of Railroads and Harbors.

"We need local highway officials to be an early warning system for crossing problems," says Tom Wildenborg, chief of the Railroad Engineering Section at WisDOT.

Railroad crossings have been the focus of renewed attention nationally since there were school bus incidents at crossings in suburban Chicago and northeastern Wisconsin. The seminars addressed issues highlighted in a national FHWA report. In addition to installing reflectorized material at passive grade crossings, other issues are:

- Identifying and signing sagged and humped crossings that can hang up truck trailers
- Solving problems where stop signs or traffic signals back traffic up across tracks
- Promoting grade crossing closure with federal and railroad incentives
- Inspecting and maintaining interconnects between crossing signals and traffic signals
- Promoting *Operation Lifesaver*, a national railroad crossing safety education program for children, motorists and professional drivers.

Local communities are being strongly encouraged to close grade crossings. Railroads may offer incentive payments, which a Federal program will match dollar for dollar up to \$7500 per crossing. The Federal money must be used for transportation safety. Railroads may also offer additional unrestricted incentive payments over \$7500, along with paying to install barricades, remove pavement surface, and build cul de sacs on streets at crossings.

"Every crossing can be a headache," says Wildenborg. Most are crossings with no signals and many have obstacles that make safety improvements impossible. "We'd like people to drive an extra block or two to get to a safer crossing with automatic warning devices." Crossings are also a problem for the railroads in maintaining the track.

The safety seminars stressed the importance of communication between railroads and local officials, public works directors, engineers, streets commissioners, and emergency people to ease the process of closing a crossing.

For more information on railroad crossing safety contact Tom Wildenborg at 608/267-7349, e-mail: twildenb@mail.state.wi.us.

Nov 2	Rhineland	Nov 9	Green Bay
Nov 3	Cable	Nov 10	Brookfield
Nov 4	Eau Claire	Nov 11	Barneveld
Nov 5	Tomah		

UW-Madison Seminars

Local government officials are eligible for a limited number of scholarships for the following engineering courses in Madison. For details, use the form on page 7, call 800/442-4615, or e-mail: ranum@engr.wisc.edu.

- Traffic Engineering Fundamentals, Jul 22-24
- Neighborhood Design and Traffic Calming, Sep 10-11
- Managing Snow and Ice Control Operations, Oct 5-6
- Implementing a Sidewalk Management System, Oct 7-8
- Stormwater Detention Basin Design, Oct 26-29
- Municipal Engineering for Non-Engineers, Nov 2-3
- Evaluation and Rehabilitation of Pavements, Nov 4-6
- Managing Urban Forestry Programs, Nov 5-6
- Managing the Environmental Impacts of Public Works Operations, Nov 16-17
- Highway Bridge Design and Rating, Dec 7-9

Other training opportunities

Snow Plow Roadeo The Roadeo sponsored by the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Public Works Association is your opportunity to test the best crew you've got against crews from other communities in friendly competition. It's also a great way to get everyone tuned up and ready for winter. Held Wednesday, October 7, at the Waukesha County fairgrounds. Call Bill Kappel at 414-286-2369 for more details.