



# INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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**Eric Holcomb, Governor**  
**Michael Smith, Commissioner**

## ***Oversight and Examination of Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination and Safety***

***Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 10 a.m.***

***U.S. House of Representatives – Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials***

To the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials:

My name is Mike Smith, Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Transportation. It's an honor to be here today and thank you for your time.

Concerning highway-rail crossings and rail crossing safety, Indiana faces a unique challenge that comes with immense opportunity. With Chicago, the nation's largest rail hub, in close proximity to the Hoosier State, some of the busiest rail lines cross Indiana, resulting in more than 7,500 highway-grade crossings, the fifth highest in the U.S.

Over the last two decades, we've seen a decrease in the number of highway-rail grade crossing collisions and as a state, we've made great strides in our efforts to improve safety and mobility through crossing removals, grade separations and other upgrades.

Even as we gain momentum, Indiana still finds itself among the highest incidences of rail crossing collisions, injuries and fatalities each year. As of November, there were 78 collisions at public highway-railroad crossings in 2023, resulting in 12 fatalities and 20 injuries. These numbers make it clear that the job is not finished, and there is more work to be done.

In Indiana, multiple agents of change are in play related to rail crossing safety, one of those being INDOT's Local Trax Rail Overpass Program, through which the agency serves as an example to others in developing innovative programs that promote and encourage collaboration and teamwork amongst state, local, and private partners.

In 2018, Governor Eric Holcomb and INDOT announced twelve local communities receiving Local Trax funding for grade separation, crossing closure and other safety enhancement projects at local rail intersections, totaling more than \$125 million in state dollars. We anticipate eleven projects across the state to be under construction by the end of next year (2025).

One of the larger Local Trax efforts is a grade separation project in Elkhart County. The more than \$40 million project will construct a rail overpass to improve safety and mobility for motorists, pedestrians and trains at two existing at-grade crossings. In addition to the grade separation, the county is investing in nearby infrastructure, further improving the area for the local community.

Multiple projects in Indiana were recipients of a total of \$21 million in Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) grants from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), one of those being the Governor's Parkway Railroad Overpass project in Hammond. The nearly \$17 million project will eliminate two at-grade crossings and provide a safer, more efficient grade-separated overpass for all road users in an area that regularly sees long-term train blockages, resulting in access concerns for pedestrians, drivers and emergency services.

These efforts, through INDOT's Local Trax program, are an illustration of the agency's ongoing commitment to engage and collaborate with local partners to improve safety, mobility and quality of life for Hoosiers.

The State has also seen exponential growth in successful use of Section 130 Rail-Highway Crossing Program funds. Through the federal program, Indiana is on track to improve 85 of the state's top 100 high-risk public crossings over the next five years (by 2029).

The State's data-driven approach and comprehensive planning efforts have resulted in 122 crossing improvement projects in the last three years alone (2021-2023), including safety improvements such as installation of warning bells, lights and overhead cantilevers to larger-scale grade separation projects and crossing removals.

Indiana's efforts are outlined in the state's Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Action Plan. As we await final plan approval from the FRA, a variety of strategies have been identified to continue our focus on system-wide, multidisciplinary solutions that will be prioritized for funding and implemented going forward, including:

- Closing crossings or creating separations to eliminate interactions between trains and road users
- Upgrading passive warnings to active, improving and maintaining existing devices
- Engaging local agencies on traffic signal preemption and how it can be implemented
- Collaborating with railroads and local agencies to explore broader implementation and maintenance of passive warning enhancements
- Informing and educating stakeholders on highway-rail grade crossing topics
- Considering rail-grade crossing safety in all transportation projects
- Collaborating with enforcement agencies to help prevent crashes at highway-rail grade crossings

Aside from crossing safety improvements, progress is continuing on the South Shore Line's Double Track and West Lake Corridor commuter rail projects in northwest Indiana. Both projects will enhance mobility in one of the state's largest urban areas near Chicago and make up the largest public transit investment in state history. The Double Track project is expected to begin revenue service in spring/summer 2024, followed by the West Lake Corridor project in 2025.

The final concept I have to share is INDOT's new agency safety goal – to reduce fatalities and incapacitating injuries by 25 percent over 10 years. This is a measurable goal for the entirety of Indiana's roadway network, state and local, and includes incidents at highway-rail crossings. INDOT will be leading the charge in this endeavor and intends to work with partners at all levels to create positive change and improve roadway safety. One of the biggest challenges we're up against, similar to crossing safety, is changing driver behavior. In a world of cell phones and other countless distractions for drivers, it's imperative that we all work together on the shared priority that is safety.

Sincerely,

**Michael J. Smith**

**Commissioner**

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