



Watchlist Fact Sheet – Rail

Railway crossing safety

The risk of trains and vehicles colliding at crossings remains too high.

Background

The risk of collisions between passenger trains and vehicles, particularly in the busy Quebec City–Windsor rail corridor was identified on the Transportation Safety Board of Canada's (TSB's) first Watchlist in 2010. The crossings in this corridor have been the focus of attention by Transport Canada, the railways, and road authorities. There has been a significant decrease in accidents as many crossings have been assessed and improved. In 2013, there were four collisions with vehicles in this corridor: three with passenger trains and one with a freight train.

However, the number of level crossing accidents in the rest of Canada has not decreased substantially over the past 10 years,¹ and the TSB is concerned that the risk of trains and vehicles colliding remains too high. Over the past 10 years outside the corridor, there have been 1865 train–vehicle crossing collisions, with 165 fatalities and 271 serious injuries.

Warning signs at both public and private crossings are the first line of defence to help reduce risk, by making drivers aware of crossings. Approximately one-third of public crossings in Canada have crossing gates and/or flashing lights and bells.² Despite these warning devices, collisions between vehicles and trains continue to occur, including a fatal accident between an OC Transpo bus and a VIA Rail train in Ottawa in 2013.

Transport Canada has been actively dealing with this issue for many years. Recent safety action includes:

- Developing grade crossing regulations to provide more comprehensive standards for all railway crossings
- Developing new low-clearance advance warning signs at railway crossings in collaboration with the Transportation Association of Canada
- Supporting Operation Lifesaver for public education about railway safety.

The TSB has issued 11 recommendations on various crossing issues over the past 21 years. While some TSB recommendations have been addressed, five remain active and responses are rated only Satisfactory Intent or Satisfactory in Part.³

Solution

Transport Canada must implement new grade crossing regulations, develop enhanced standards or guidelines for certain types of crossing signs, and continue its leadership in assessing crossing safety and funding improvements.

A comprehensive solution must also include consultation with provincial authorities and further public driver education on the dangers at railway crossings.

¹ Non-corridor crossing accidents involving vehicles: 176 in 2009, 156 in 2010, 152 in 2011, 161 in 2012 and 165 in 2013

² Source: Transport Canada (Active warning devices can be found at 5606 public crossings.)

³ TSB Recommendations R93-11, R01-05, R09-01, R09-02, and R09-04