

## Improvements to rail crossings planned as ODOT and Gov. Fallin announce \$100 million initiative

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 26, 2014

PR# 14-034

For too many drivers in Oklahoma, a faded railroad crossing sign is their only warning that a 250 ton locomotive is about to cross their path.

Tuesday, Gov. Mary Fallin and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation announced a new initiative to fast-track hundreds of projects to improve more than 300 rail crossings statewide and upgrade safety warning features on rail crossings across Oklahoma. Many of these crossings have only rail crossing signs or faint pavement markings and no flashing lights or cross arms to serve as additional warning for motorists of oncoming trains.

At a press conference Tuesday at the State Capitol, Gov. Mary Fallin was joined by Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Gary Ridley, ODOT Executive Director Mike Patterson and rail company representatives in announcing the development of a plan for \$100 million in improvements to rail crossings across the state. These improvements are being funded through combining proceeds from the recent sale of the Sooner-Sub rail line in addition to dedicated rail safety funds from ODOT and other partners.

According to ODOT, of the more than 3,700 at-grade rail crossings in the state, many have some level of recognized deficiencies when it comes to rail crossing safety. Most of the crossings are on local roads but the department remains involved because of overall rail safety.

"First and foremost, this initiative will help to save lives by boosting safety at hundreds of rail road crossings," Fallin said. "It's also another step forward for Oklahoma's rail industry and infrastructure, which is essential to our state's commerce and economic growth,"

Accidents involving trains and vehicles are tragic and often result in fatalities and extensive property damage, especially if the accident causes a subsequent derailment. The most concerning issue is these accidents are almost entirely preventable if proper safety infrastructure and warning devices are in place and if motorists heed the warnings these devices display.

"The department has long recognized the great need for improving rail crossings on the state, county and local transportation system. Now with the influx of funding available from the sale of the Sooner Sub, we are excited to use this money to expedite the process of improving safety along rail systems across the state," ODOT Executive Director Mike Patterson said.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation anticipates the rail crossings can be modernized and greatly improved by adding rail safety infrastructure such as high-visibility signage, cross bucks, gates, hazard lighting and pavement markings. Rail funding will be leveraged with other available public and private monies to improve as many priority rail crossings as possible while also partnering with rail companies and local entities for the long term maintenance of the improvements. Historically, railroad companies have partnered with the department because safety is extremely important not only to the public, but also to the companies' safe operation and transportation of goods.

Until Tuesday's announcement, Oklahoma has never had the funding resources to conduct the large-scale safety improvement program needed to address the tremendous backlog of vital improvements at rail crossings. Previously, ODOT was able to spend approximately \$8 million a year in rail safety program funds which improved about 25 crossings per year. Depending on the needs of the specific site, crossing improvements can

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INFORMATION RELEASE

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typically cost between \$150,000 and \$350,000. ODOT and its state, local and private sector partners have done what they could through rail outreach and infrastructure programs such as Operation Lifesaver, but the needs continue to far outweigh the resources available.

“With this initiative announced today, we believe Oklahoma should serve as a model for the rest of the country when it comes to proactively supporting safe rail crossings and the safe and efficient transport of products along rail corridors,” Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Gary Ridley said.

The Sooner Sub rail line sale was finalized with the Stillwater Central Railroad (SLWC), a WATCO Company, earlier this month and includes track improvements and a trial passenger rail service on the line within the next five years at no cost to the state or taxpayers.

Improvements to rail line crossings on highways and roads across Oklahoma will be accelerated under the new safety initiative. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation expects to complete a preliminary multi-year plan of locations and improvements in early 2015.

-[www.okladot.state.ok.us](http://www.okladot.state.ok.us)-

**(Editors and News Directors: \*\*\*See attachment for CORRECTED rail crossing accident data. \*\*\* For more information, please call the ODOT Media and Public Relations Office at 405-521-6000.)**



On Tuesday, Gov. Mary Fallin and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation announced a new initiative to fast-track hundreds of projects to improve more than 300 rail crossings statewide and upgrade safety warning features on rail crossings across Oklahoma, like this one on N.E. 150th St. between Peebly Rd. and Triple X Rd. near Luther in Oklahoma County.



## OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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### Rail Crossing Safety Initiative

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The investment will improve the safety of the traveling public as well as the safety of the private sector freight and passenger rail on Oklahoma's rail infrastructure.

**\*\*\*Corrected Information\*\*\***

**In calendar year 2013, 8 people were killed and 13 injured in accidents at rail crossings, according to the Federal Railroad Administration.**

Gov. Mary Fallin and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation announce a comprehensive railroad crossing safety initiative.

ODOT will spend \$100 million on a statewide railroad safety initiative, which could improve crossings at more than 300 locations.

ODOT will identify locations for safety improvements based a many factors such as average daily traffic counts on the roadway and track, accident data, condition of the crossing and regional needs.

A preliminary multi-year plan of locations and improvements is anticipated in early 2015.

The accelerated plan will be funded through one-time proceeds from the sale of the Sooner Sub rail line in addition to dedicated rail safety funds from ODOT and other partners.

Currently ODOT spends approximately \$8 million a year in rail safety program funds which improves about 25 crossings per year.

Depending on the needs of the specific site, crossing improvements can typically cost between \$150,000 to \$350,000.

ODOT's ongoing safety initiative will develop an investment strategy for these one-time monies.

The plan will leverage public and private sector funds to improve as many priority rail crossings as possible while also partnering with rail companies and local entities for long term maintenance of the improvements.

More than 3,700 at-grade crossings in Oklahoma; 287 of those are on the state highway system. Most of the crossings are on local roads but the department remains involved because of overall rail safety.

*"The mission of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation is to provide a safe, economical, and effective transportation network for the people, commerce and communities of Oklahoma."*

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