



BLOCKED RAILROAD CROSSINGS

Key Facts

- Normal freight operations can block train crossings.
- Railroads work with communities and the government to improve crossing safety.
- Grade separation projects are an effective long-term solution to reducing crossings.

With more than 200,000 [grade crossings](#) nationwide, railroads work closely with local leaders, government agencies, and first responders to manage and mitigate crossing impacts while ensuring safe and efficient freight movement. Railroads deploy operational strategies, invest in infrastructure and technology, and collaborate with communities to improve safety and reduce disruptions at crossings.

Train crossings can be blocked due to routine operations, such as switching railcars, weather delays, equipment inspections, and interactions with other rail traffic. Emergencies, vandalism, and infrastructure issues can also cause temporary disruptions. While railroads strive to minimize delays, some interruptions are unavoidable due to the complexity of rail logistics.

RAILROADS' STRATEGIES TO REDUCE CROSSING IMPACTS

The most effective long-term solution is reducing the number of crossings through consolidation, upgrades, and grade separation projects. Since 2005, the number of public crossings has decreased by 10%, thanks to partnerships with local and federal agencies. Infrastructure investments, siding extensions, and technology—such as digital signs and real-time crossing alerts—help further minimize delays and enhance public safety.

Railroads also support public safety education through initiatives like Operation Lifesaver, which promotes awareness of rail-highway crossing risks. Additionally, emergency hotlines at all crossings provide direct communication with railroads for rapid response.

A GROWING CHALLENGE: FREIGHT VOLUMES AND POPULATION DENSITY

Two key trends have increased crossing challenges:

1. **Freight volumes have become more concentrated** along fewer, more efficient rail corridors.
2. **Population growth near rail lines** has increased demand for road infrastructure where crossings exist. Unlike other developed nations that invested in grade separations early on, U.S. infrastructure has not kept pace. Public funding constraints have resulted in short-term solutions instead of long-term planning.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE SOLUTIONS: INVESTING IN GRADE SEPARATIONS

Ultimately, the safest crossing is no crossing at all. While railroads play a role in reducing blocked crossings, states and local governments are responsible for infrastructure investment. Grade separations—such as bridges or underpasses—are the only long-term fix for high-impact crossings.

The [Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency \(CREATE\) Program](#) is a model for success, with 25 grade separations reducing delays, improving safety, and minimizing emissions. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has provided \$600 million annually for grade crossing elimination, helping states cover up to 80% of project costs. Railroads typically fund about 10% of these projects and provide land for construction.

COMMITMENT TO SAFER AND MORE EFFICIENT RAIL OPERATIONS

Railroads will continue partnering with federal, state, and local officials to improve crossings, reduce disruptions, and enhance public safety. Through strategic investments, technology, and collaboration, railroads are committed to keeping communities connected while ensuring the safe and efficient movement of freight across the nation.