

January 17, 2018

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

Collisions at highway-rail grade crossings are a leading cause of railroad-related fatalities and injuries. In Florida, we have seen the challenges of addressing grade crossing safety, where according to 2016 data the state is in the top ten for fatalities and collisions. Tragically, this trend is continuing with two recent fatalities in Boynton Beach involving the Brightline high-speed train. While these investigations are ongoing, I urge you to examine these incidents and to review the safety of rail crossings, particularly for higher speed trains.

Congress has long encouraged the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the states to improve highway-rail grade crossings. The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 required the top ten states with the highest number of highway-rail grade crossing collisions, including Florida, to submit plans that identified specific solutions for improving safety at crossings. In that plan, Florida identified that Palm Beach County, where these incidents occurred, was one of the highest counties for such incidents. The FAST Act also required DOT to update action plans and provided funding to states to address grade crossing safety.

The Department of Transportation through the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration is tasked with addressing highway-rail grade crossings. I ask that you examine these incidents to determine whether additional actions need to be taken to improve grade crossing safety. Also, please provide additional information on what actions the Department has taken to address highway-rail grade crossing safety, specifically:

- What is the status of the State Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plans, including the updated state plans, required by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act?
- What changes have been made to address crossings with higher-speed trains, particularly those traveling through areas with a history of collisions? What additional actions should be taken at high-risk crossings?
- Beyond state plans, what actions has DOT taken to improve safety with states that have a high number of collisions and fatalities?
- What actions have been taken to address specific concerns raised with pedestrians?
- What additional technology or training could assist in preventing collisions and fatalities at crossings?
- How have state agencies used federal funds to promote and improve safety at crossings?

- When will DOT move forward with awarding the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement grants that Congress authorized in the FAST Act to assist states and railroads to address safety and infrastructure issues, including highway-rail grade crossing improvement projects?

I appreciate your urgent attention to this critical safety issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator